By
MIKE W. BARR
DARICK ROBERTSON
JIM SINCLAIR
KEITH AIKEN
NORM BREYFOGLE

Full-Color Series

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Innovation Publishing welcomes fan-favorite illustrator **Norm Breyfogle** to the cover art of this exciting issue of *THE MAZE AGENCY*!

Once again, join New York's prettiest detective, *Jennifer Mays*, and true crime writer *Gabriel Webb*, in a startling fair-play whodunit that challenges you to solve the mystery as it unfolds!

THIS ISSUE: In "Terrible Swift Sword," it's a beautiful fall night -- and The MAZE Agency's Jennifer & Gabe are camping with their friends, the Rydell family. Aside from Gabe being a tenderfoot, there's tension in the nighttime air: Carly, the Rydell's 15-year-old daughter, has become involved with "The Church of Michael," a religious cult! What's more, Judah and Sister Ruth have arrived from the cult -- bringing with them mayhem and murder!

Someone's Not A Happy Camper!

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INNOVATION™

Good Times, Reality Checks -- And Balances

As writers, as artists, as creators, we are purveyors of fantasies, of dreams, of illusions -- offering heroes and legends and adventures in far-off times and lands.

Our readers and fans are the realities: fine people who work in 20th Century society and are willing to pay good money to experience and appreciate the make-believe comic book pseudo-realities we've crafted of talent and vapor and good intentions.

That's why, when I was invited to **The 19th Annual Pennsic War** (held in Pennsylvania), I looked upon it as an unbeatable brush with fantasy -- indulge myself, and experience the medieval fantasies firsthand.

I originally considered it a chance to meet some of our fans who have shrugged off their day-to-day lives as "mundanes" for a week and a half (or some portion thereof) to become warriors or scouts or gentles, maidens or wenches, or even barbarian dogs of Gor, awash (or not!) in period clothing, names made up for the occasion, and well-mannered references of "My Lady" and "My Lord."

If you've never enjoyed camping, good booze, good friends, a sense of the unusual and the wonderful, or a more varied selection of merchants than you could ever hope to find at a Con, then you've got to go to Pennsic.

It's put on each year by the Society for Creative Anachronism [The SCA], complete with rule books and a $30 participation fee, and it was one of the most all-out enjoyable weekends I've ever made the time to spend.

[The closest I'd come before this, and just beating Pennsic in terms of vigor and polished sheer showmanship, was a dinner-and-jousting tournament at *Medieval Times* in California. There's also one in New Jersey and one in Florida, and you've *got* to experience one some time! Trust me on this.]

It was a real kick seeing accountants, lawyers, bus drivers, computer programmers, strippers, cyberpunk writers, and other professionals of the "real world" immersing themselves into their fantasy roles with aplomb. (The cars are "dragons," the cigarettes and the Reeboks are admittedly out of place, but you've gotta make *some* allowances.)

The only unpleasantness I experienced was during "open camp" night in the usually-closed, barbarian-themed Two-Chuck camp. A "wench" I knew in a previous life had invited me, and so had a beautiful "priestess" I knew from another camp. The grog and the beer were flowing freely -- and some of the Two-Chucks took their role-playing a bit too seriously.

I was taking the opportunity to chat with one of our loveliest freelancers [the "priestess"], when two of the barbarians apparently decided I was monopolizing her time and wanted to make their feelings known.

Well, "two against one" is never fair, the wrenched back, the bruised arm, and the cracked rib seemed a bit much, the ripped tunic was a borrowed one, the knifed tire on my car was definitely overboard, and I really didn't *need* to examine the mud and the gravel that closely.

In a fantasy village swarming with 7,000 official attendees, there are always a few individuals who take things too far. They need a reality check.

The rest of us need more good times -- and good friends -- like the ones I found at Pennsic War.

-- David Campiti
September, 1990

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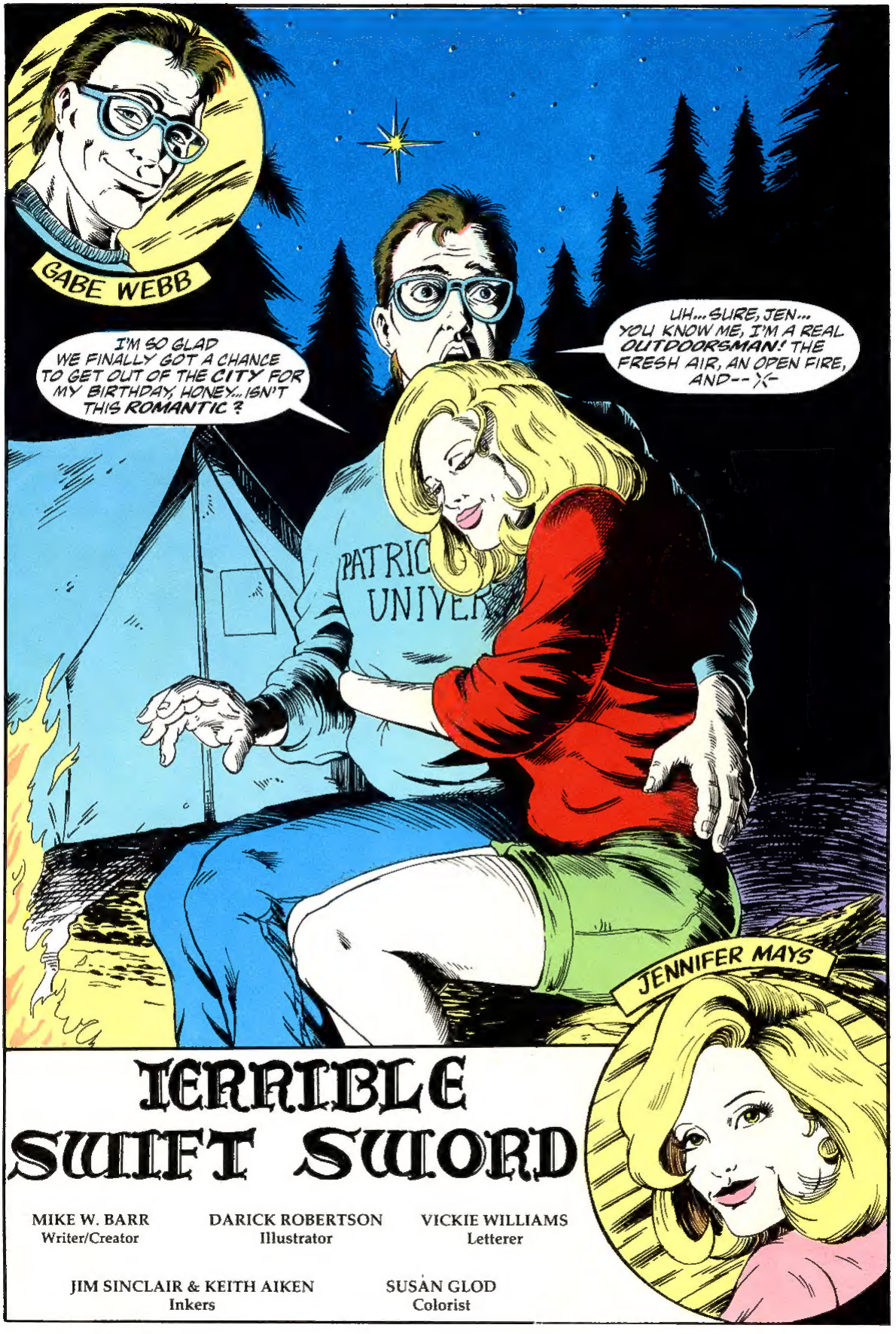

TERRIBLE SWIFT SWORD

MIKE W. BARR
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DARICK ROBERTSON
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VICKIE WILLIAMS
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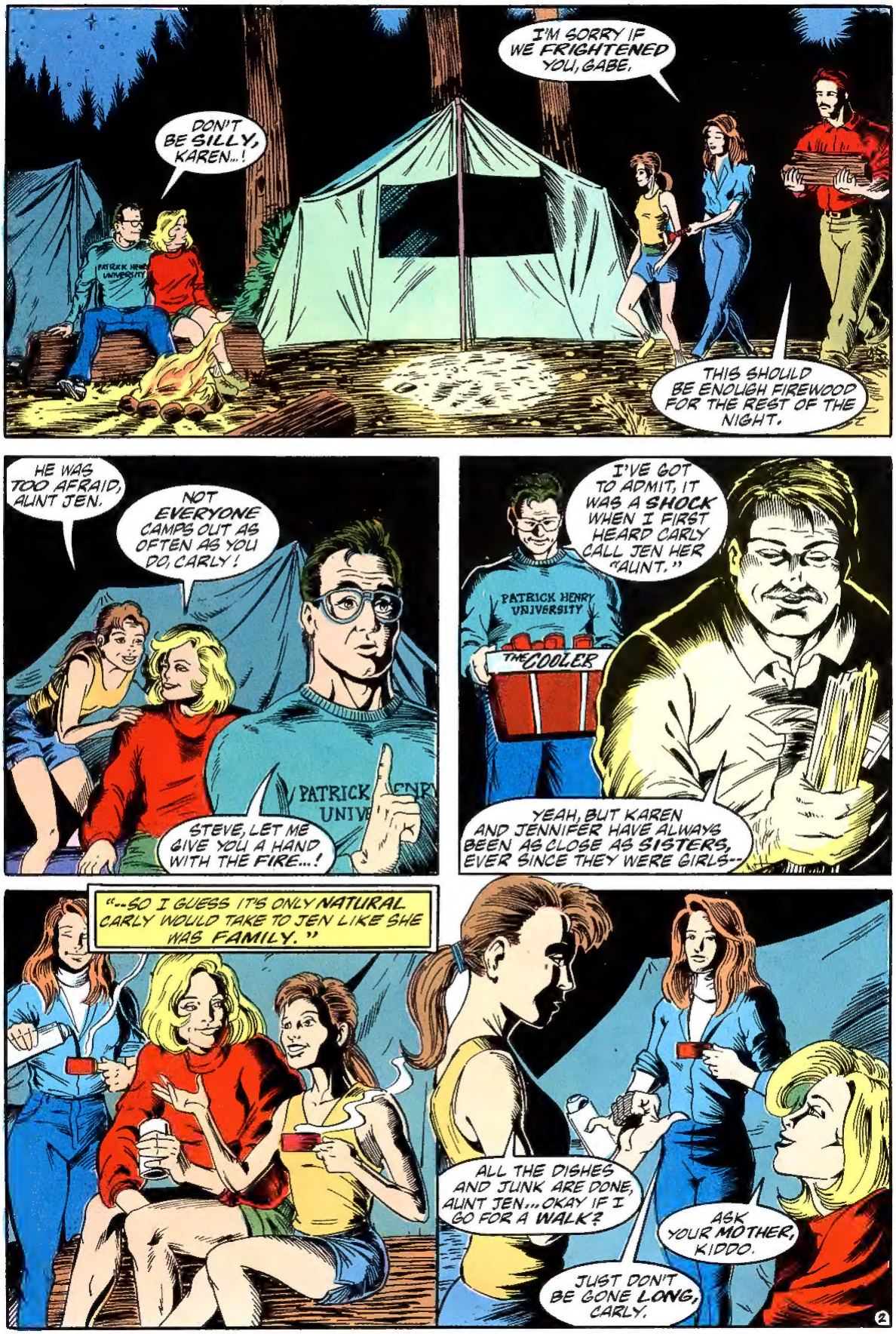
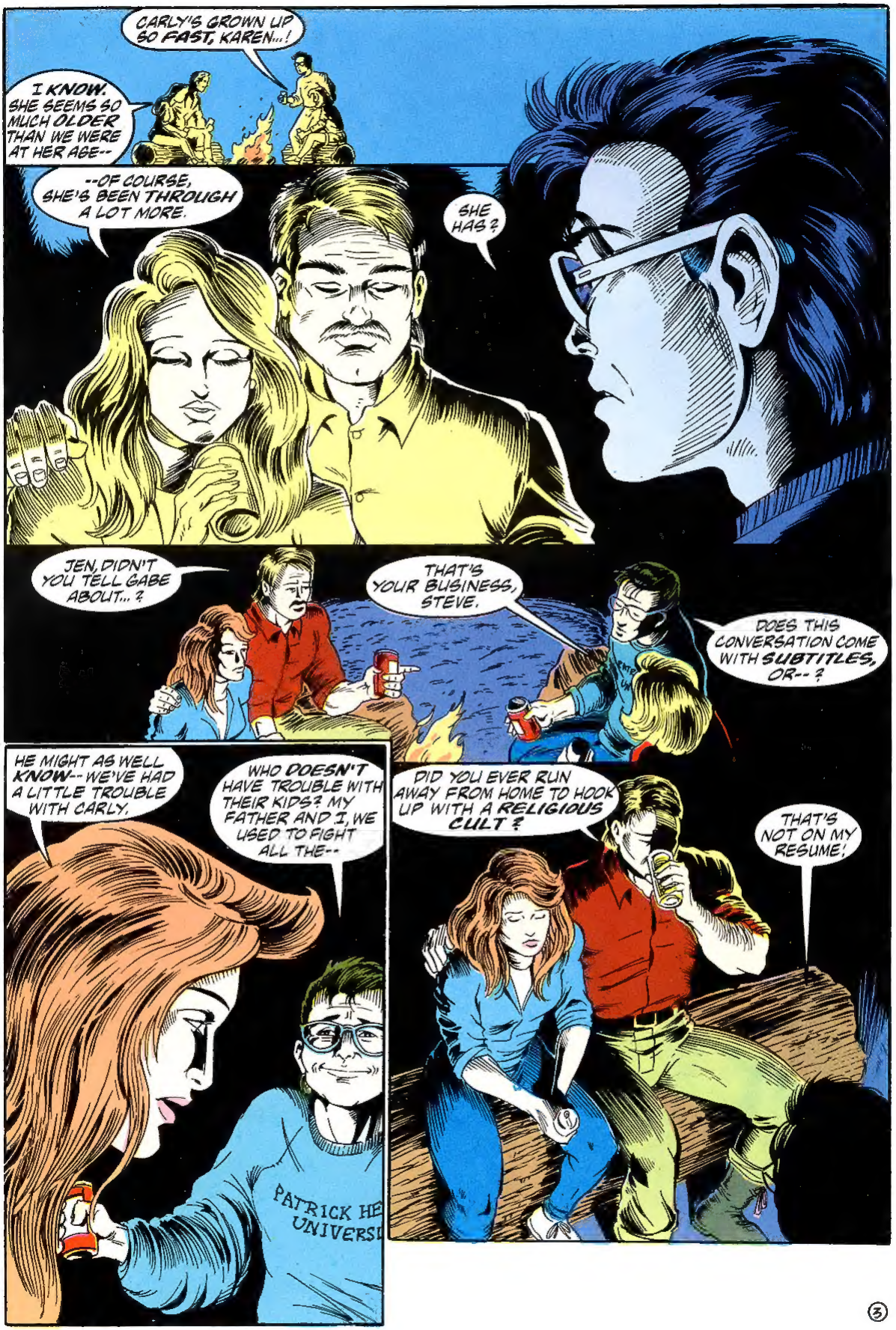
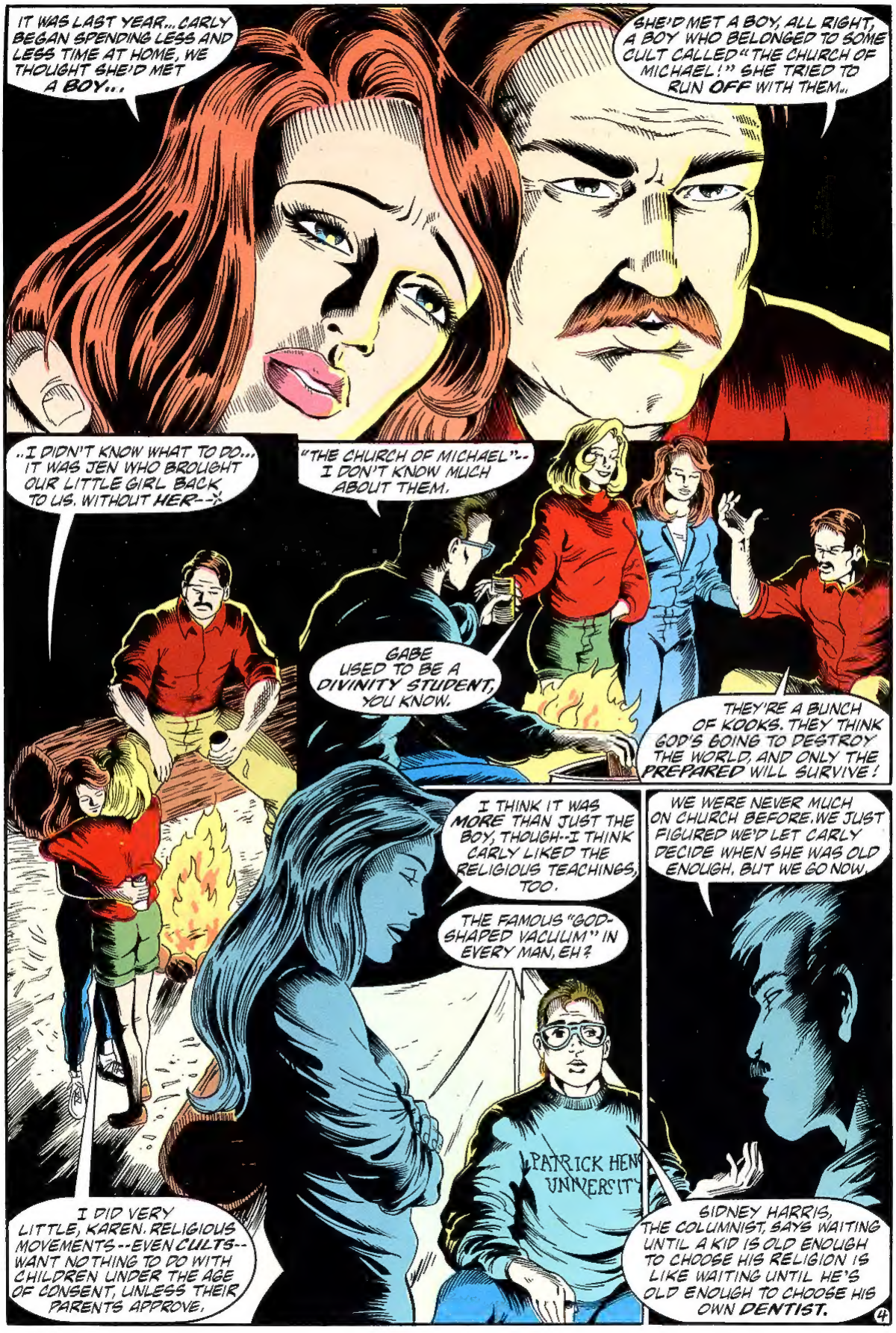
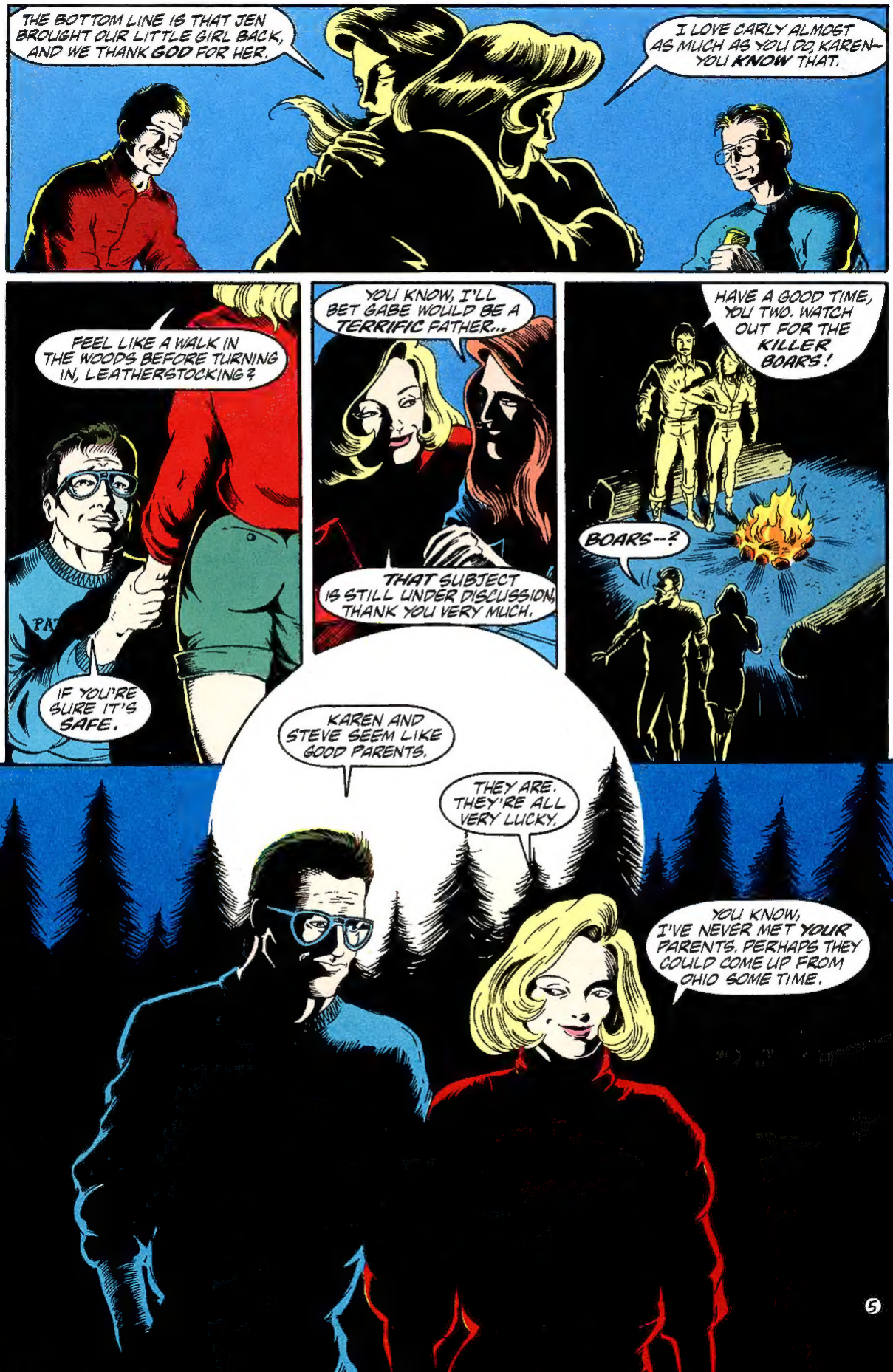
Inkers

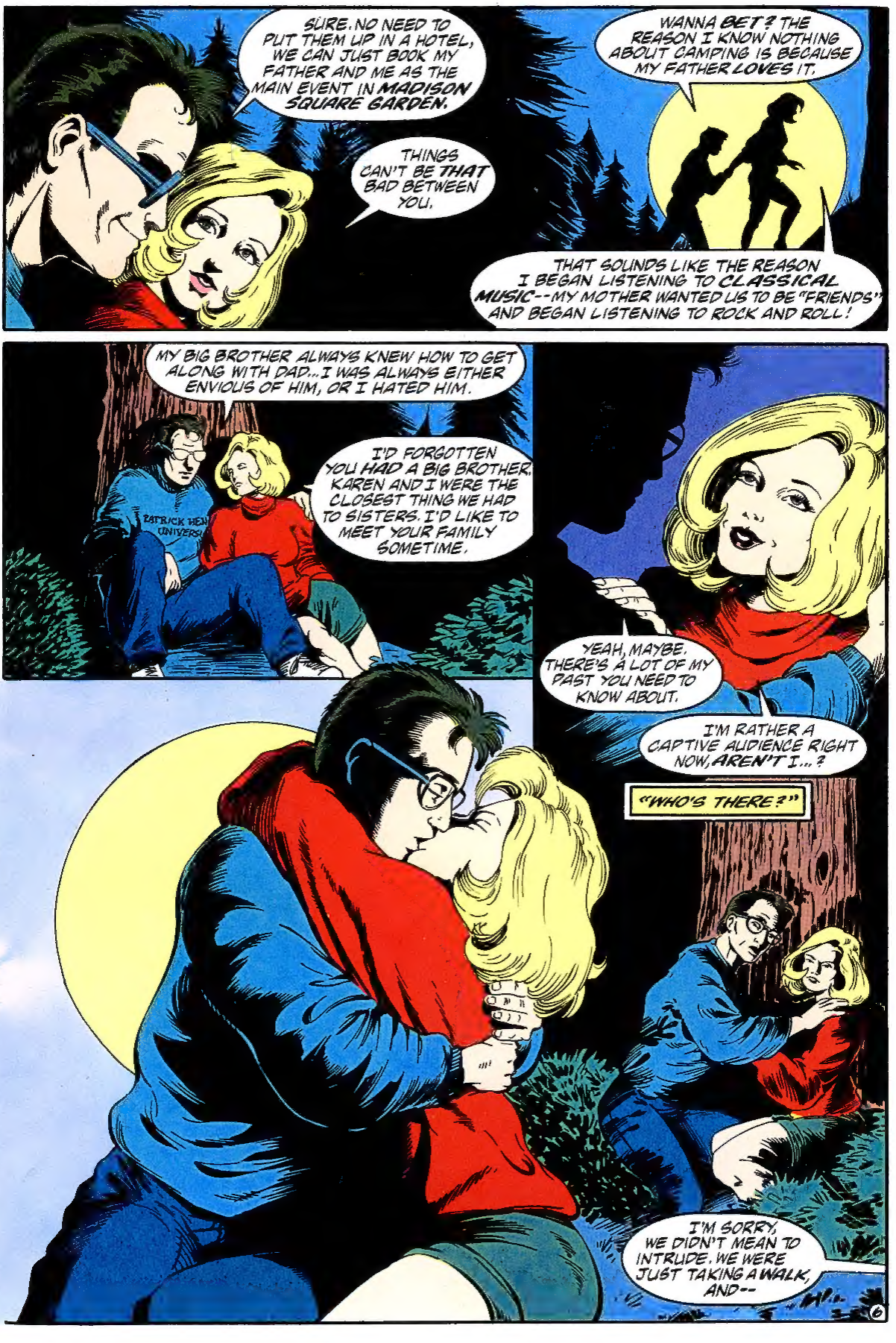
SUSAN GLOD
Colorist


I'M SORRY IF WE FRIGHTENED YOU, GABE.
DON'T BE SILLY, KAREN...!
PATRICK HENRY UNIVERSITY
THIS SHOULD BE ENOUGH FIREWOOD FOR THE REST OF THE NIGHT.
HE WAS TOO AFRAID, AUNT JEN.
NOT EVERYONE CAMPS OUT AS OFTEN AS YOU DO, CARLY!
PATRICK
STEVE, LET ME GIVE YOU A HAND WITH THE FIRE...!
I'VE GOT TO ADMIT, IT WAS A SHOCK WHEN I FIRST HEARD CARLY CALL JEN HER "AUNT."
PATRICK HENRY UNIVERSITY
THE COOLER
YEAH, BUT KAREN AND JENNIFER HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AS CLOSE AS SISTERS, EVER SINCE THEY WERE GIRLS--
"--SO I GUESS IT'S ONLY NATURAL CARLY WOULD TAKE TO JEN LIKE SHE WAS FAMILY."
ALL THE DISHES AND JUNK ARE DONE, AUNT JEN... OKAY IF I GO FOR A WALK?
ASK YOUR MOTHER, KIDDO.
JUST DON'T BE GONE LONG, CARLY.
2


CARLY'S GROWN UP SO FAST, KAREN...!
I KNOW. SHE SEEMS SO MUCH OLDER THAN WE WERE AT HER AGE--
--OF COURSE, SHE'S BEEN THROUGH A LOT MORE.
SHE HAS?
JEN, DIDN'T YOU TELL GABE ABOUT...?
THAT'S YOUR BUSINESS, STEVE.
DOES THIS CONVERSATION COME WITH SUBTITLES, OR--?
HE MIGHT AS WELL KNOW-- WE'VE HAD A LITTLE TROUBLE WITH CARLY.
WHO DOESN'T HAVE TROUBLE WITH THEIR KIDS? MY FATHER AND I, WE USED TO FIGHT ALL THE--
DID YOU EVER RUN AWAY FROM HOME TO HOOK UP WITH A RELIGIOUS CULT?
THAT'S NOT ON MY RESUME!


IT WAS LAST YEAR... CARLY BEGAN SPENDING LESS AND LESS TIME AT HOME, WE THOUGHT SHE'D MET A BOY...
SHE'D MET A BOY, ALL RIGHT, A BOY WHO BELONGED TO SOME CULT CALLED "THE CHURCH OF MICHAEL!" SHE TRIED TO RUN OFF WITH THEM...
..I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO... IT WAS JEN WHO BROUGHT OUR LITTLE GIRL BACK TO US. WITHOUT HER--
"THE CHURCH OF MICHAEL"-- I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT THEM.
GABE USED TO BE A DIVINITY STUDENT, YOU KNOW.
THEY'RE A BUNCH OF KOOKS. THEY THINK GOD'S GOING TO DESTROY THE WORLD, AND ONLY THE PREPARED WILL SURVIVE!
I THINK IT WAS MORE THAN JUST THE BOY, THOUGH--I THINK CARLY LIKED THE RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS, TOO.
THE FAMOUS "GOD-SHAPED VACUUM" IN EVERY MAN, EH?
WE WERE NEVER MUCH ON CHURCH BEFORE. WE JUST FIGURED WE'D LET CARLY DECIDE WHEN SHE WAS OLD ENOUGH, BUT WE GO NOW.
I DID VERY LITTLE, KAREN. RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS--EVEN CULTS--WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF CONSENT, UNLESS THEIR PARENTS APPROVE.
SIDNEY HARRIS, THE COLUMNIST, SAYS WAITING UNTIL A KID IS OLD ENOUGH TO CHOOSE HIS RELIGION IS LIKE WAITING UNTIL HE'S OLD ENOUGH TO CHOOSE HIS OWN DENTIST.
PATRICK HEN UNIVERSITY
4


THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT JEN BROUGHT OUR LITTLE GIRL BACK, AND WE THANK GOD FOR HER.
I LOVE CARLY ALMOST AS MUCH AS YOU DO, KAREN--YOU KNOW THAT.
FEEL LIKE A WALK IN THE WOODS BEFORE TURNING IN, LEATHERSTOCKING?
IF YOU'RE SURE IT'S SAFE.
YOU KNOW, I'LL BET GABE WOULD BE A TERRIFIC FATHER...
THAT SUBJECT IS STILL UNDER DISCUSSION, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
HAVE A GOOD TIME, YOU TWO. WATCH OUT FOR THE KILLER BOARS!
BOARS--?
KAREN AND STEVE SEEM LIKE GOOD PARENTS.
THEY ARE. THEY'RE ALL VERY LUCKY.
YOU KNOW, I'VE NEVER MET YOUR PARENTS. PERHAPS THEY COULD COME UP FROM OHIO SOME TIME.


SURE. NO NEED TO PUT THEM UP IN A HOTEL, WE CAN JUST BOOK MY FATHER AND ME AS THE MAIN EVENT IN MADISON SQUARE GARDEN.
THINGS CAN'T BE THAT BAD BETWEEN YOU.
WANNA BET? THE REASON I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT CAMPING IS BECAUSE MY FATHER LOVES IT.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE THE REASON I BEGAN LISTENING TO CLASSICAL MUSIC--MY MOTHER WANTED US TO BE "FRIENDS" AND BEGAN LISTENING TO ROCK AND ROLL!
MY BIG BROTHER ALWAYS KNEW HOW TO GET ALONG WITH DAD... I WAS ALWAYS EITHER ENVIOUS OF HIM, OR I HATED HIM.
I'D FORGOTTEN YOU HAD A BIG BROTHER. KAREN AND I WERE THE CLOSEST THING WE HAD TO SISTERS. I'D LIKE TO MEET YOUR FAMILY SOMETIME.
YEAH, MAYBE. THERE'S A LOT OF MY PAST YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT.
I'M RATHER A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE RIGHT NOW, AREN'T I...?
"WHO'S THERE?"
I'M SORRY, WE DIDN'T MEAN TO INTRUDE. WE WERE JUST TAKING A WALK, AND--

TAKING A WALK, WERE YOU? FORNICATION IS WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE TO ME!
YOU DON'T GET A VOTE, PAL! LOOK, WE'LL JUST GET OUT OF HERE, AND--
NOT TILL I FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE!
PUT THAT AWAY, THERE'S NO NEED FOR--
AGGGG--!
JUDAH, HAVE YOU FOUND THE BOY? WHAT'S THE MATTER HERE? WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE?

I BELIEVE THAT'S MY QUESTION.
THIS...THIS IS PRIVATE PROPERTY, YOU CAN'T--
LEAVE US--LEAVE US NOW!
THAT KNIFE IS MINE.
THEN TAKE IT.
THUNK!
COME ON, GABE.
RIGHT BEHIND YOU, JEN. WHERE'D "THE ADDAMS FAMILY" COME FROM, ANYWAY?
8

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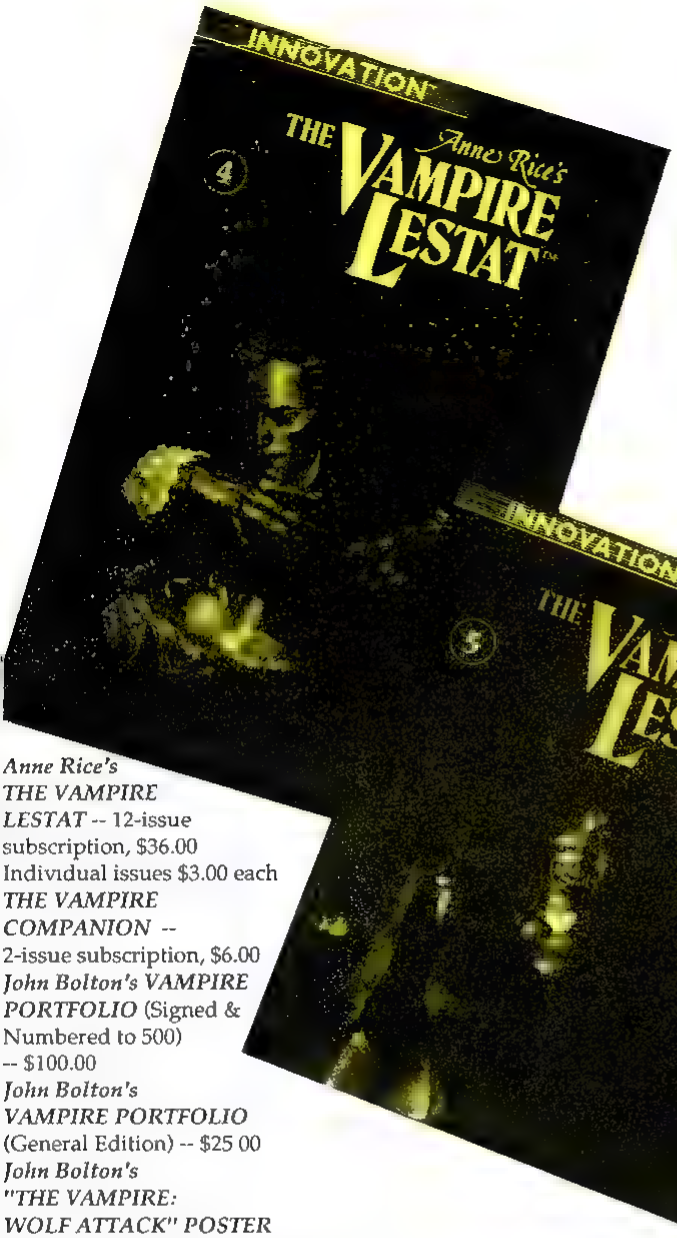

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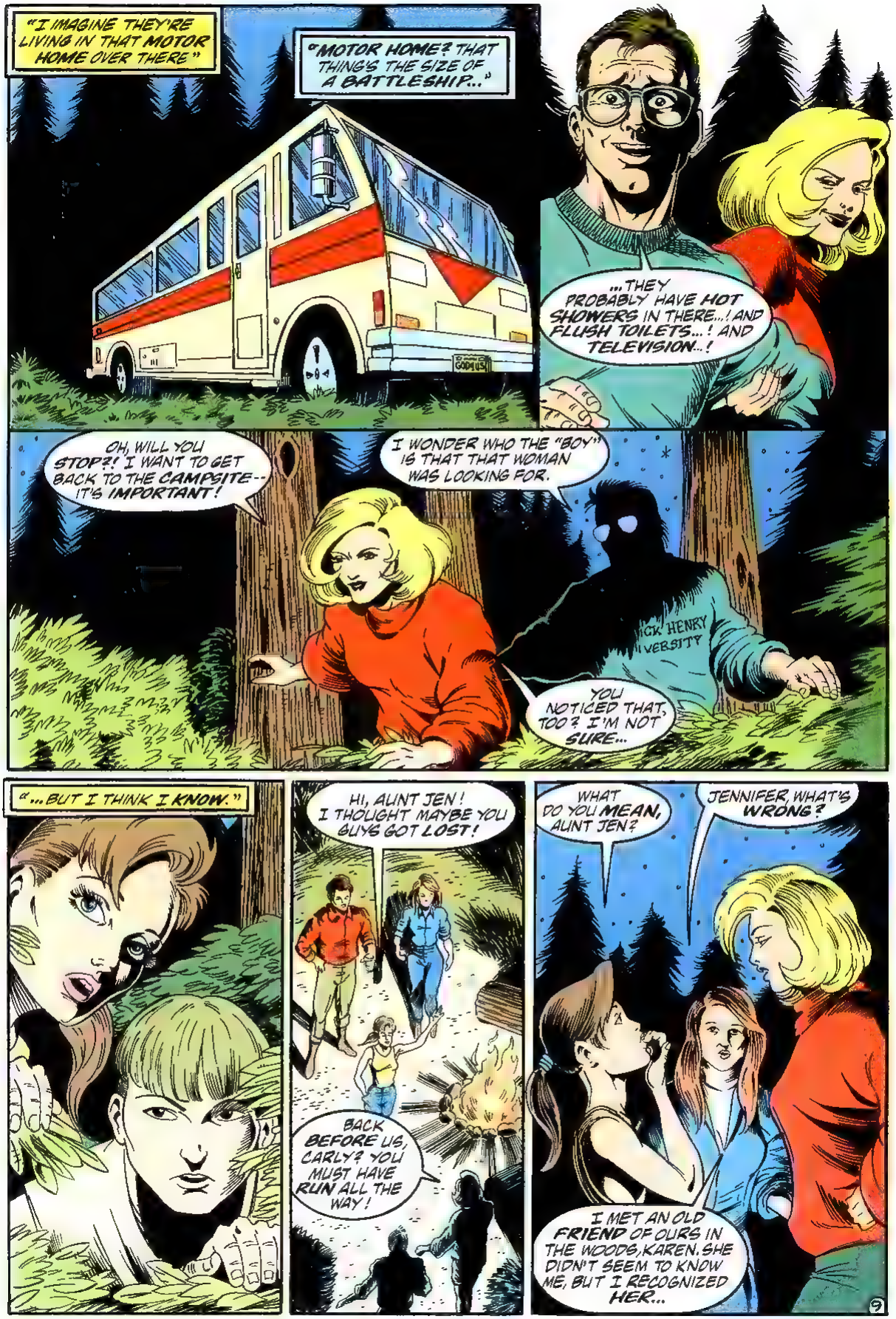
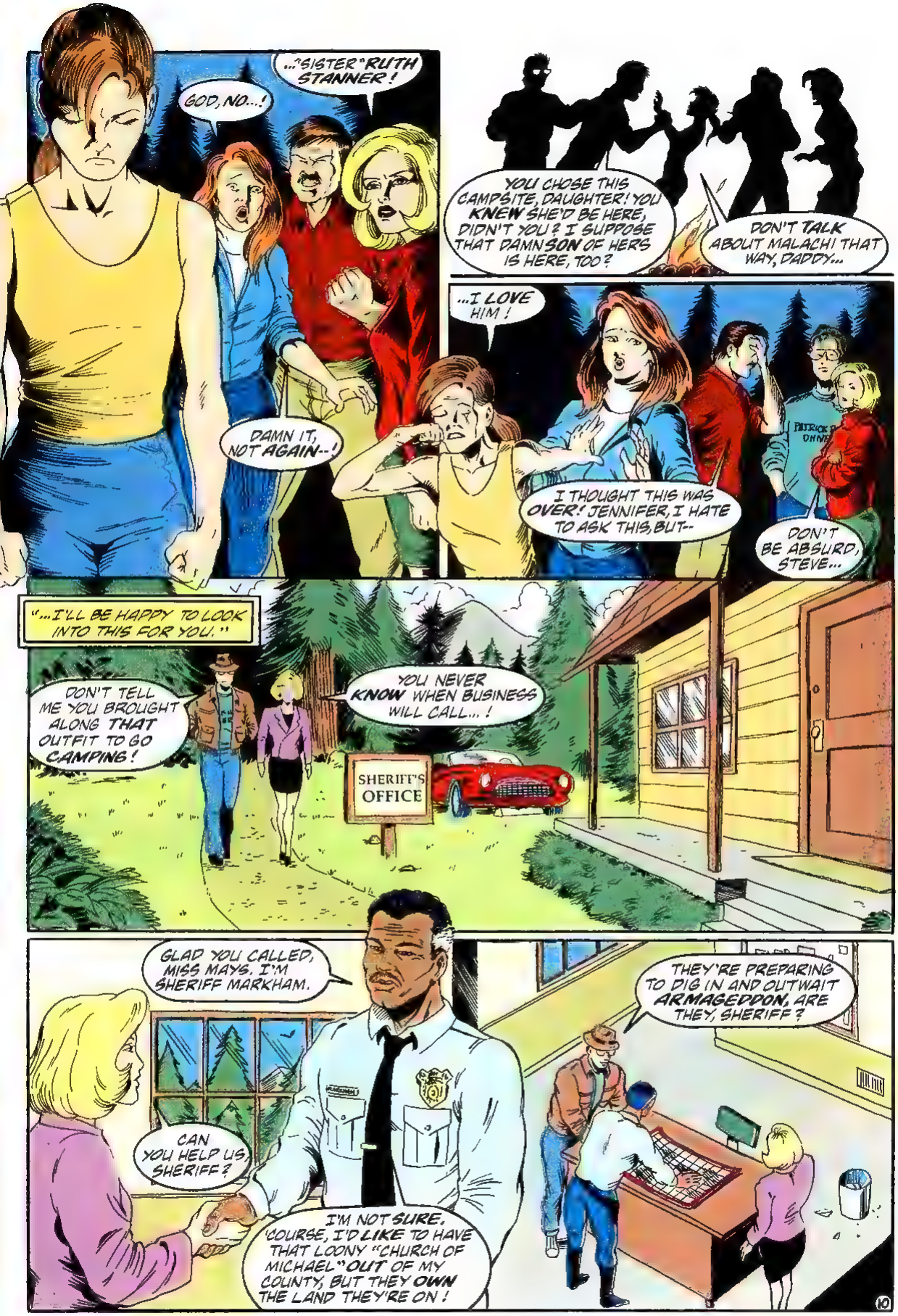
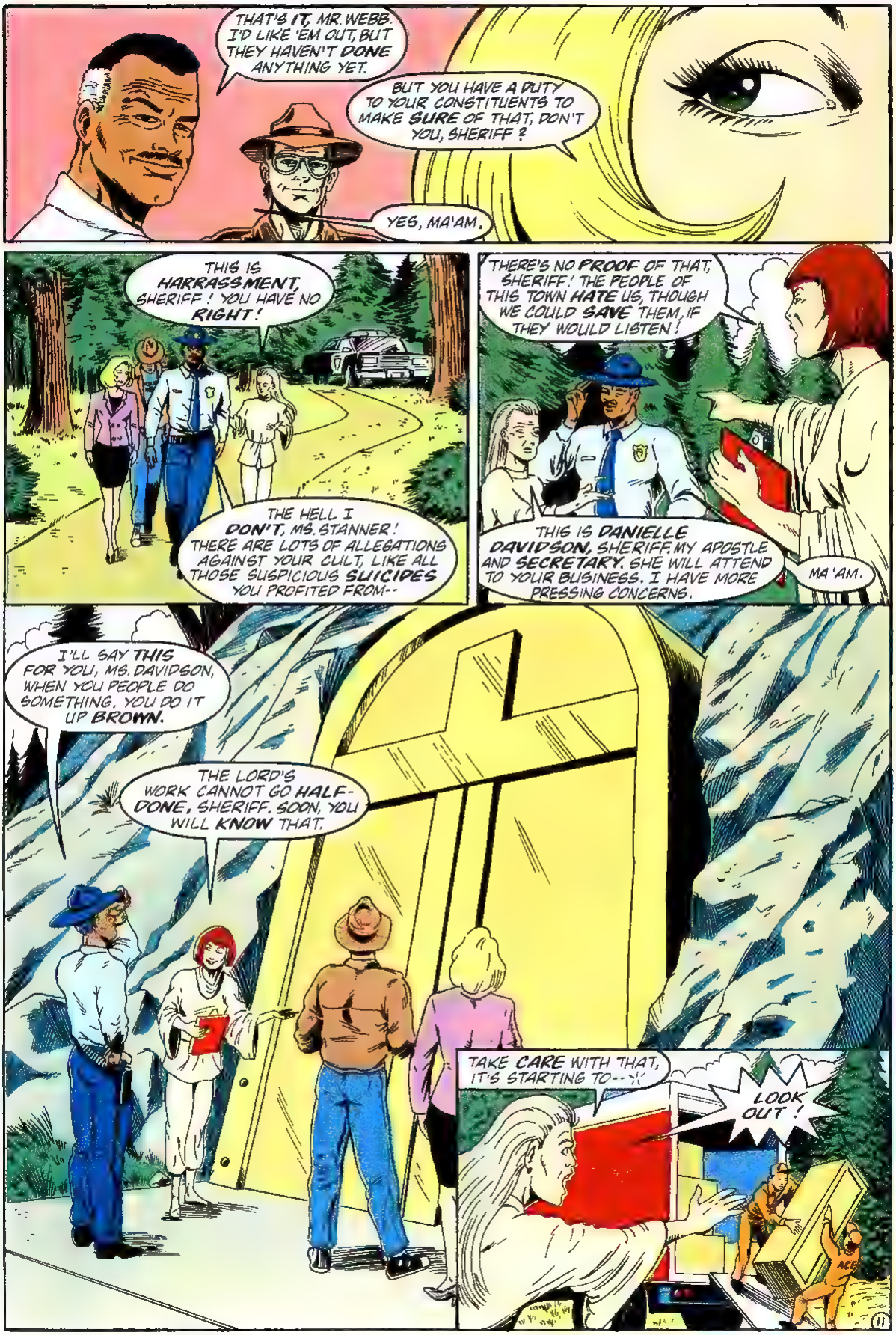
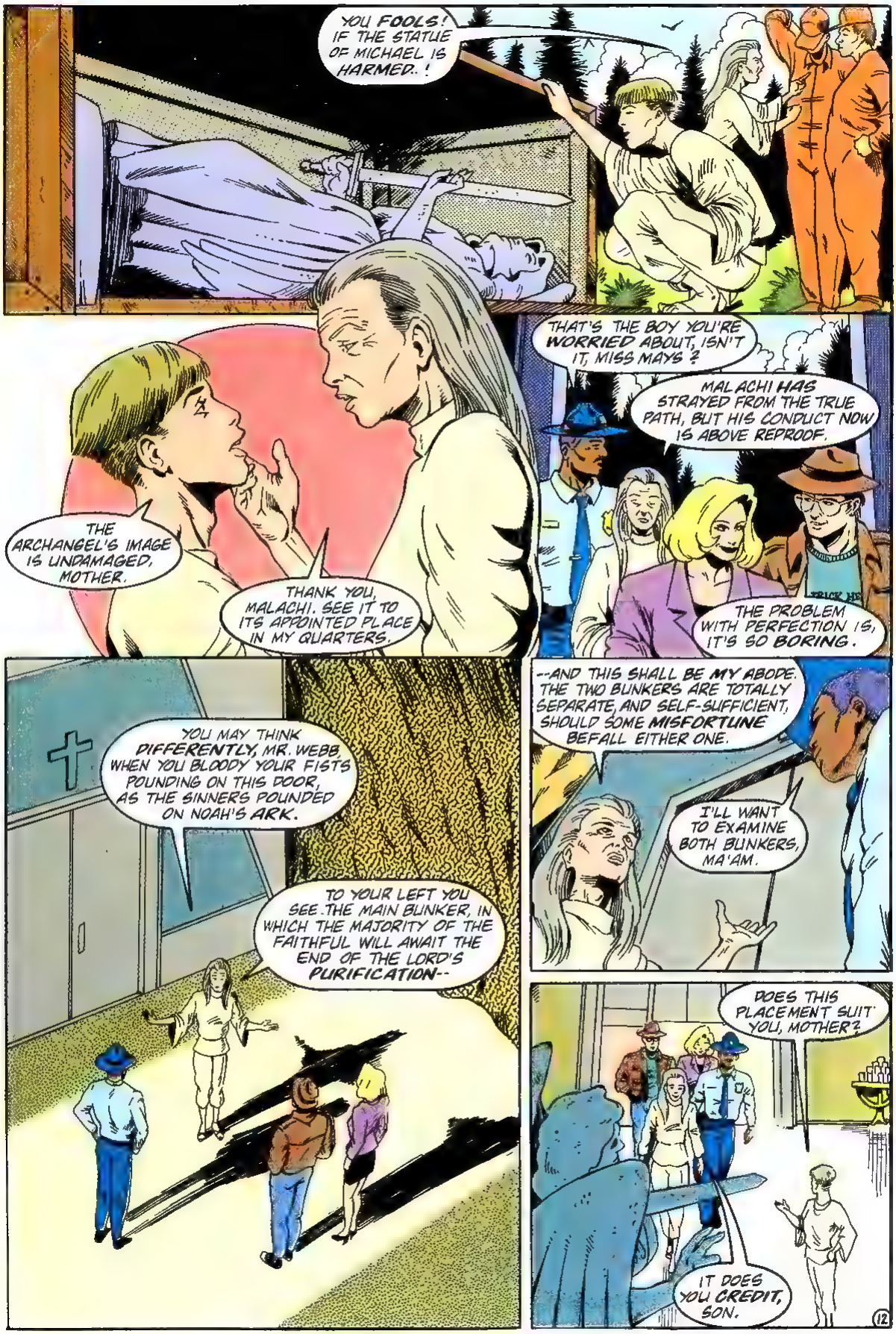
THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED
THE MASTER OF RAMPLING GATE


"I IMAGINE THEY'RE LIVING IN THAT MOTOR HOME OVER THERE"
"MOTOR HOME? THAT THING'S THE SIZE OF A BATTLESHIP..."
...THEY PROBABLY HAVE HOT SHOWERS IN THERE...! AND FLUSH TOILETS...! AND TELEVISION...!
OH, WILL YOU STOP?! I WANT TO GET BACK TO THE CAMPSITE-- IT'S IMPORTANT!
I WONDER WHO THE "BOY" IS THAT THAT WOMAN WAS LOOKING FOR.
YOU NOTICED THAT, TOO? I'M NOT SURE...
"...BUT I THINK I KNOW."
HI, AUNT JEN! I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU GUYS GOT LOST!
BACK BEFORE US, CARLY? YOU MUST HAVE RUN ALL THE WAY!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, AUNT JEN?
JENNIFER, WHAT'S WRONG?
I MET AN OLD FRIEND OF OURS IN THE WOODS, KAREN. SHE DIDN'T SEEM TO KNOW ME, BUT I RECOGNIZED HER...


...SISTER "RUTH STANNER!
GOD, NO...!
DAMN IT, NOT AGAIN--!
YOU CHOSE THIS CAMPSITE, DAUGHTER! YOU KNEW SHE'D BE HERE, DIDN'T YOU? I SUPPOSE THAT DAMN SON OF HERS IS HERE, TOO?
DON'T TALK ABOUT MALACHI THAT WAY, DADDY...
...I LOVE HIM!
I THOUGHT THIS WAS OVER! JENNIFER, I HATE TO ASK THIS, BUT--
DON'T BE ABSURD, STEVE...
"...I'LL BE HAPPY TO LOOK INTO THIS FOR YOU."
DON'T TELL ME YOU BROUGHT ALONG THAT OUTFIT TO GO CAMPING!
YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN BUSINESS WILL CALL...!
SHERIFF'S OFFICE
GLAD YOU CALLED, MISS MAYS. I'M SHERIFF MARKHAM.
THEY'RE PREPARING TO DIG IN AND OUTWAIT ARMAGEDDON, ARE THEY, SHERIFF?
CAN YOU HELP US, SHERIFF?
I'M NOT SURE, 'COURSE, I'D LIKE TO HAVE THAT LOONY "CHURCH OF MICHAEL" OUT OF MY COUNTY, BUT THEY OWN THE LAND THEY'RE ON!


THAT'S IT, MR. WEBB. I'D LIKE 'EM OUT, BUT THEY HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING YET.
BUT YOU HAVE A DUTY TO YOUR CONSTITUENTS TO MAKE SURE OF THAT, DON'T YOU, SHERIFF ?
YES, MA'AM.
THIS IS HARRASSMENT, SHERIFF ! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT !
THE HELL I DON'T, MS. STANNER ! THERE ARE LOTS OF ALLEGATIONS AGAINST YOUR CULT, LIKE ALL THOSE SUSPICIOUS SUICIDES YOU PROFITED FROM--
THERE'S NO PROOF OF THAT, SHERIFF ! THE PEOPLE OF THIS TOWN HATE US, THOUGH WE COULD SAVE THEM, IF THEY WOULD LISTEN !
THIS IS DANIELLE DAVIDSON, SHERIFF. MY APOSTLE AND SECRETARY. SHE WILL ATTEND TO YOUR BUSINESS. I HAVE MORE PRESSING CONCERNS.
MA'AM.
I'LL SAY THIS FOR YOU, MS. DAVIDSON, WHEN YOU PEOPLE DO SOMETHING, YOU DO IT UP BROWN.
THE LORD'S WORK CANNOT GO HALF-DONE, SHERIFF. SOON, YOU WILL KNOW THAT.
TAKE CARE WITH THAT, IT'S STARTING TO--
LOOK OUT !
ACE
11


YOU FOOLS! IF THE STATUE OF MICHAEL IS HARMED..!
THAT'S THE BOY YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT, ISN'T IT, MISS MAYS?
MALACHI HAS STRAYED FROM THE TRUE PATH, BUT HIS CONDUCT NOW IS ABOVE REPROOF.
THE ARCHANGEL'S IMAGE IS UNDAMAGED, MOTHER.
THANK YOU, MALACHI. SEE IT TO ITS APPOINTED PLACE IN MY QUARTERS.
THE PROBLEM WITH PERFECTION IS, IT'S SO BORING.
--AND THIS SHALL BE MY ABODE. THE TWO BUNKERS ARE TOTALLY SEPARATE, AND SELF-SUFFICIENT, SHOULD SOME MISFORTUNE BEFALL EITHER ONE.
I'LL WANT TO EXAMINE BOTH BUNKERS, MA'AM.
YOU MAY THINK DIFFERENTLY, MR. WEBB, WHEN YOU BLOODY YOUR FISTS POUNDING ON THIS DOOR, AS THE SINNERS POUNDED ON NOAH'S ARK.
TO YOUR LEFT YOU SEE THE MAIN BUNKER, IN WHICH THE MAJORITY OF THE FAITHFUL WILL AWAIT THE END OF THE LORD'S PURIFICATION--
DOES THIS PLACEMENT SUIT YOU, MOTHER?
IT DOES YOU CREDIT, SON.
12

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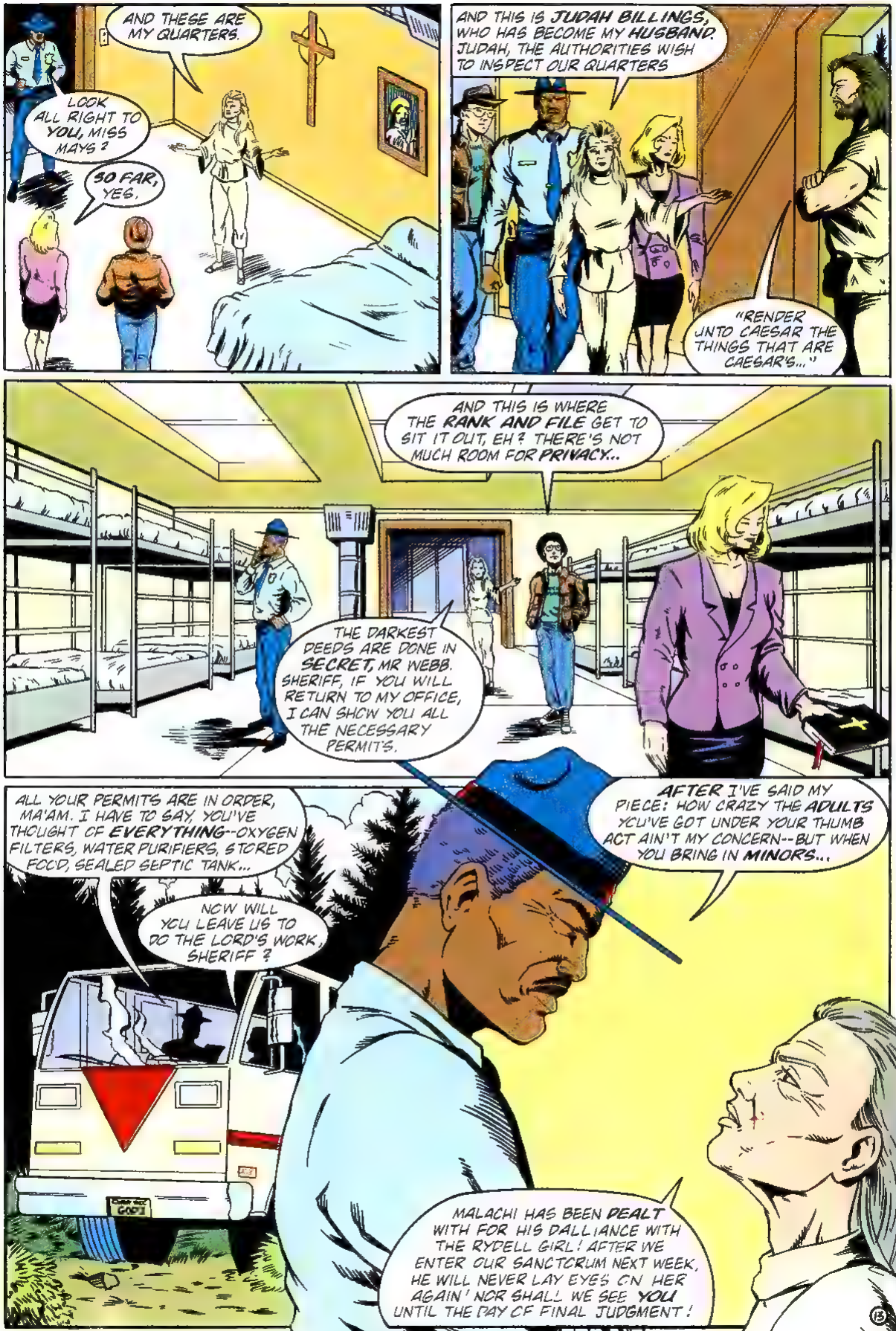
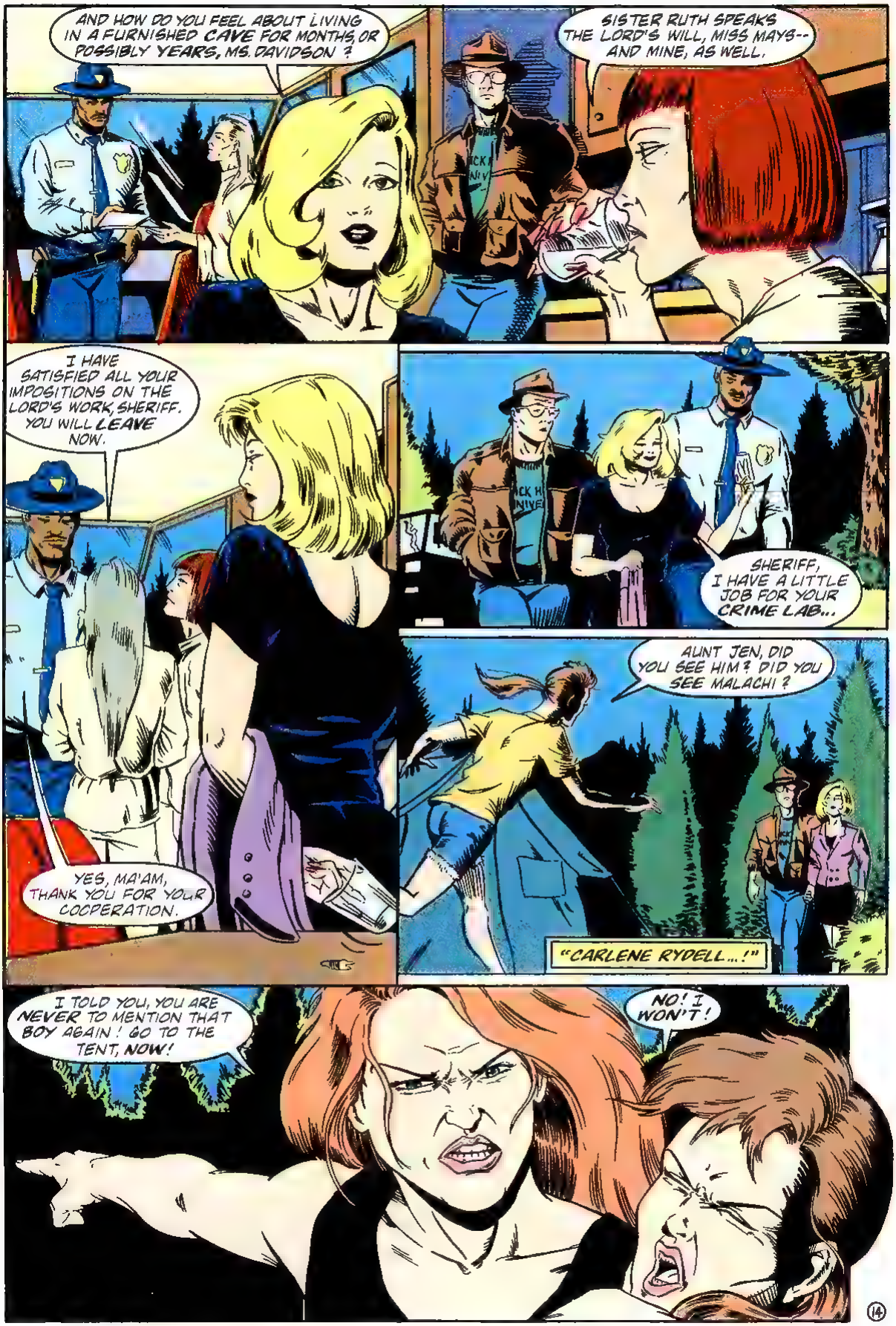
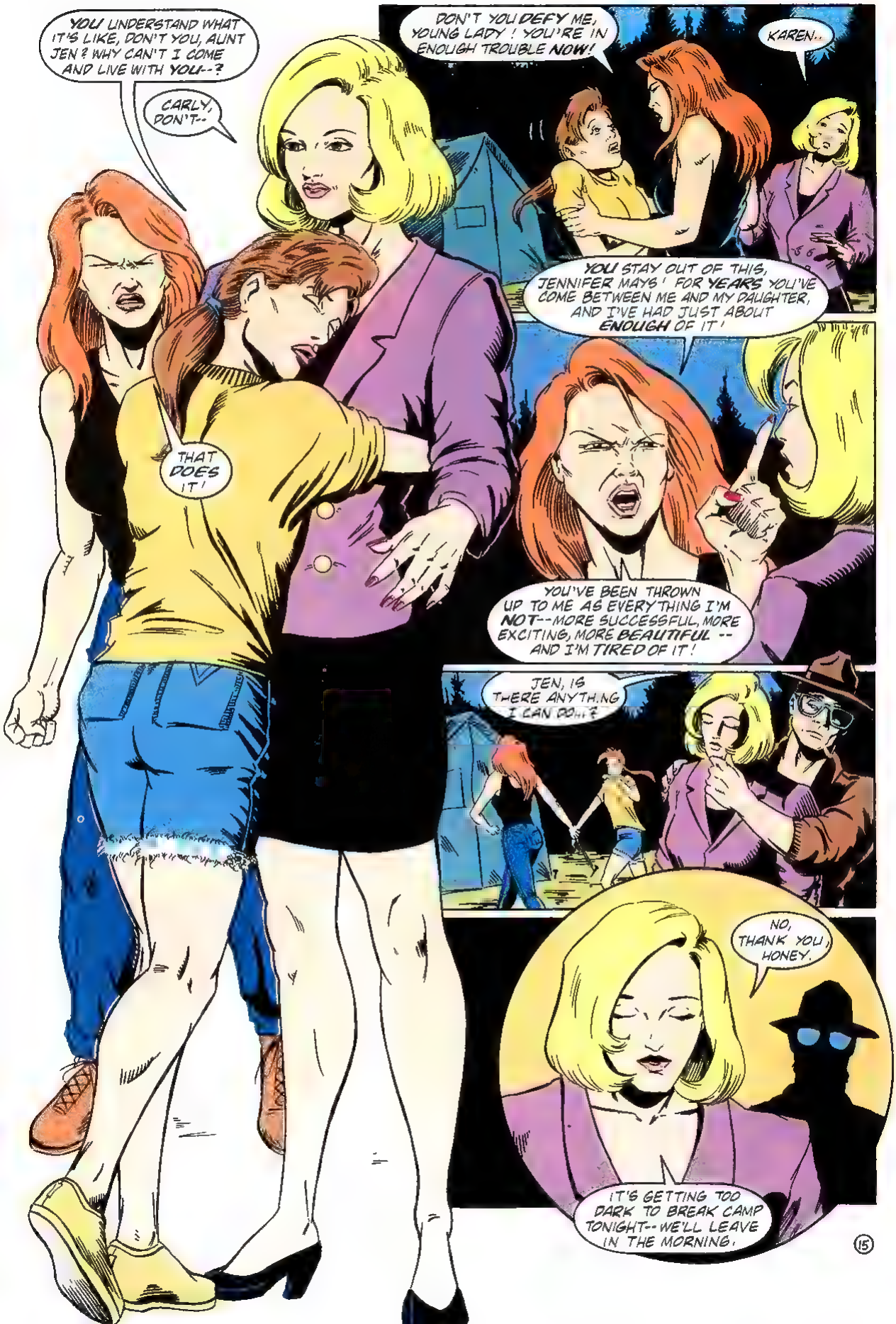
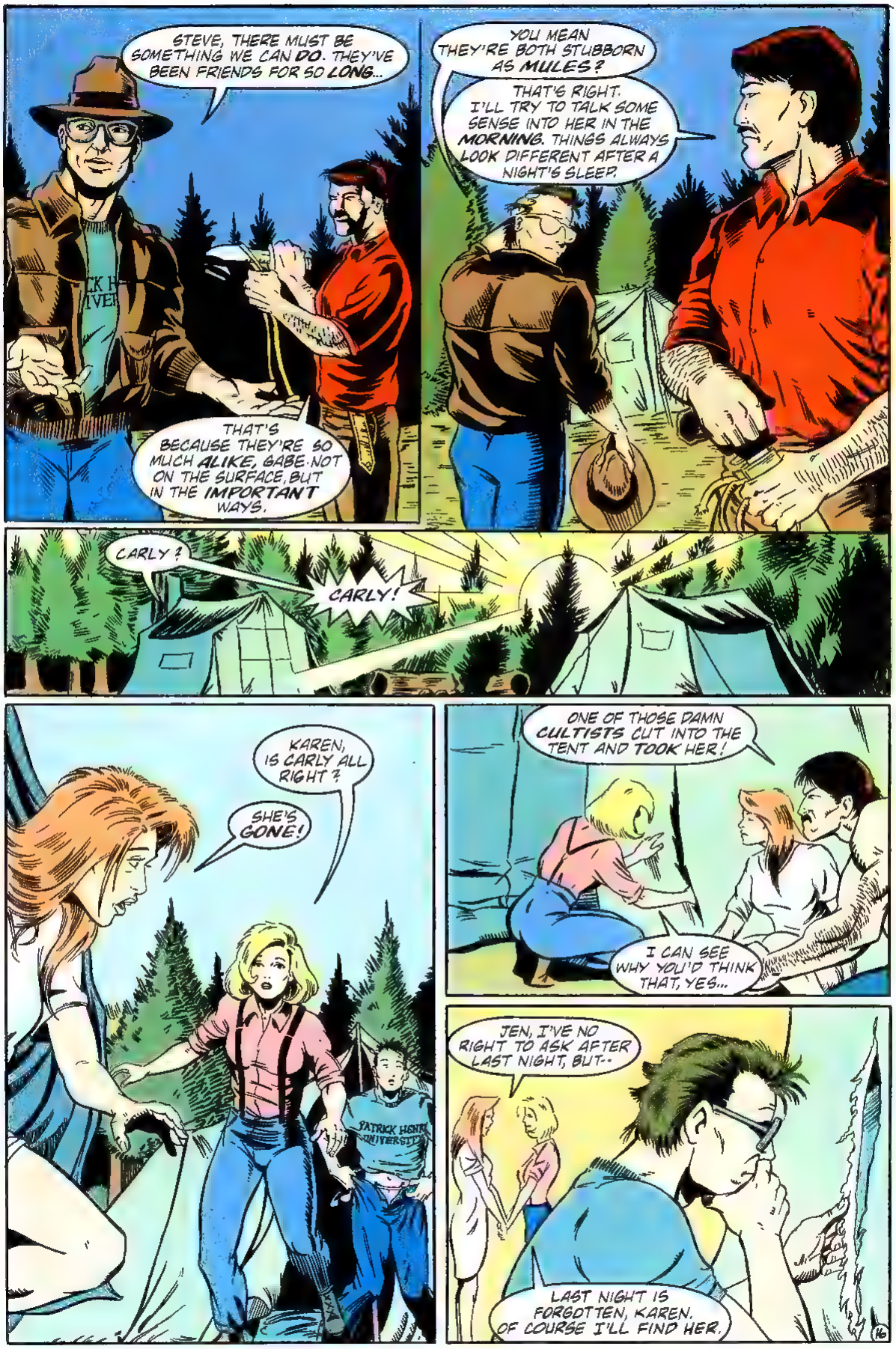
INNOVATION


AND THESE ARE MY QUARTERS.
LOOK ALL RIGHT TO YOU, MISS MAYS?
SO FAR, YES.
AND THIS IS JUDAH BILLINGS, WHO HAS BECOME MY HUSBAND. JUDAH, THE AUTHORITIES WISH TO INSPECT OUR QUARTERS
"RENDER UNTO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S..."
AND THIS IS WHERE THE RANK AND FILE GET TO SIT IT OUT, EH? THERE'S NOT MUCH ROOM FOR PRIVACY...
THE DARKEST DEEDS ARE DONE IN SECRET, MR WEBB. SHERIFF, IF YOU WILL RETURN TO MY OFFICE, I CAN SHOW YOU ALL THE NECESSARY PERMITS.
ALL YOUR PERMITS ARE IN ORDER, MA'AM. I HAVE TO SAY, YOU'VE THOUGHT OF EVERYTHING--OXYGEN FILTERS, WATER PURIFIERS, STORED FOOD, SEALED SEPTIC TANK...
NOW WILL YOU LEAVE US TO DO THE LORD'S WORK, SHERIFF?
AFTER I'VE SAID MY PIECE: HOW CRAZY THE ADULTS YOU'VE GOT UNDER YOUR THUMB ACT AIN'T MY CONCERN--BUT WHEN YOU BRING IN MINORS...
MALACHI HAS BEEN DEALT WITH FOR HIS DALLIANCE WITH THE RYDELL GIRL! AFTER WE ENTER OUR SANCTORUM NEXT WEEK, HE WILL NEVER LAY EYES ON HER AGAIN! NOR SHALL WE SEE YOU UNTIL THE DAY OF FINAL JUDGMENT!


AND HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT LIVING IN A FURNISHED CAVE FOR MONTHS, OR POSSIBLY YEARS, MS. DAVIDSON ?
SISTER RUTH SPEAKS THE LORD'S WILL, MISS MAYS-- AND MINE, AS WELL.
I HAVE SATISFIED ALL YOUR IMPOSITIONS ON THE LORD'S WORK, SHERIFF. YOU WILL LEAVE NOW.
SHERIFF, I HAVE A LITTLE JOB FOR YOUR CRIME LAB...
YES, MA'AM, THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.
AUNT JEN, DID YOU SEE HIM? DID YOU SEE MALACHI ?
"CARLENE RYDELL...!"
I TOLD YOU, YOU ARE NEVER TO MENTION THAT BOY AGAIN ! GO TO THE TENT, NOW!
NO! I WON'T!


YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT IT'S LIKE, DON'T YOU, AUNT JEN? WHY CAN'T I COME AND LIVE WITH YOU--?
CARLY, DON'T--
DON'T YOU DEFY ME, YOUNG LADY! YOU'RE IN ENOUGH TROUBLE NOW!
KAREN..
YOU STAY OUT OF THIS, JENNIFER MAYS! FOR YEARS YOU'VE COME BETWEEN ME AND MY DAUGHTER, AND I'VE HAD JUST ABOUT ENOUGH OF IT!
THAT DOES IT!
YOU'VE BEEN THROWN UP TO ME AS EVERYTHING I'M NOT--MORE SUCCESSFUL, MORE EXCITING, MORE BEAUTIFUL -- AND I'M TIRED OF IT!
JEN, IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO...?
NO, THANK YOU, HONEY.
IT'S GETTING TOO DARK TO BREAK CAMP TONIGHT--WE'LL LEAVE IN THE MORNING.


STEVE, THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WE CAN DO. THEY'VE BEEN FRIENDS FOR SO LONG..
THAT'S BECAUSE THEY'RE SO MUCH ALIKE, GABE. NOT ON THE SURFACE, BUT IN THE IMPORTANT WAYS.
YOU MEAN THEY'RE BOTH STUBBORN AS MULES?
THAT'S RIGHT. I'LL TRY TO TALK SOME SENSE INTO HER IN THE MORNING. THINGS ALWAYS LOOK DIFFERENT AFTER A NIGHT'S SLEEP.
CARLY?
CARLY!
KAREN, IS CARLY ALL RIGHT?
SHE'S GONE!
ONE OF THOSE DAMN CULTISTS CUT INTO THE TENT AND TOOK HER!
I CAN SEE WHY YOU'D THINK THAT, YES...
JEN, I'VE NO RIGHT TO ASK AFTER LAST NIGHT, BUT--
LAST NIGHT IS FORGOTTEN, KAREN. OF COURSE I'LL FIND HER.

from the desk of
Jennifer Mays

the MAZE AGENTS

3622 Jacob Street, Wheeling, WV 26003

INTO THE MAZE

Thanks to publisher David Campiti for filling in this space last issue while yours truly was temporarily unable to comply.

I wanted very much to tell all ***MAZE*** *readers how much I liked the pencilling job of* ***Mary Mitchell****, as well as the inks of* ***Don Martinec*** *and* ***Paul Worley****. Mary came in "over the transom," so to speak -- she showed some pencilling samples to some Innovation folks at a local convention, copies got mailed to me, and I shot a script her way as soon as possible. Welcome aboard, Mary; hope you like the world of* ***THE MAZE AGENCY****.*

Darick Robertson*, of course, is familiar to all Maze Agents as the guy who jumped in at virtually the last minute to pencil the last six pages of our Spirit pastiche in* ***THE MAZE AGENCY ANNUAL #1*** *a couple months ago. Darick, an amiable young chap, gets to strut a little more of his personal style in chronicling this month's case, as aided by inkers* ***Jim Sinclair*** *and* ***Keith Aiken****. And thanks to* ***Norm Breyfogle*** *for hammering some time out of his increasingly-croweded Bat-schedule to pencil and ink that swell cover for us.*

Now for your comments on issue ***#12****, "Murderer's Mask" ..*

--MWB

Dear Mike,

Sorry for the delay in writing. Considering that I only missed one issue since the debut of ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** (due to poor stocking of my comic shop), I should be able to safely add my two cents of opinion. Besides this time you don't have *Katana* to serve her "lung buck" special to people with unpopular opinions. (Or do you?)

Overall, I do like ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** or else it would have joined many other titles in the "Don't like, Don't read, Don't buy" pile. The artwork has remained clean-cut in style and very good in looks. The coloring has also been very good; in fact, when ***MAZE BOOK: THE MAZE AGENCY COLLECTION #1*** came out, it was a bit of a shock to read the stories in black & white.

The handling of Jennifer Mays and Gabriel Webb is done nicely. There have been comparisons made between this detective duo and Maddie & David of "Moonlighting" due, no doubt, to the breezy style used in ***THE MAZE AGENCY***, but the two pairings are quite different from each other. Jen and Gabe aren't in a love-hate relationship; they're learning about each other; and both are professionals who solve the problem at hand (i.e. whodunit) instead of arguing over last night's dinner engagement.

The one minor problem I have is that the all the stories are whodunits. I realize that this is the basis for the storytelling and that it is somewhat akin to the person who complained that *Perry Mason* always won his case. (As Raymond Burr quipped, "Madame, you only see the cases I have on Saturday.") However, sometimes it borders on being a bit unreal (as with "Deadly Anniversary" in issue ***#10***).

Actually, one thing which gladdens me is that the stories are one-issue affairs; no multi-part epics with sub-plots added to stretch things out further. Of course, if you ever end up with a story that needs more than one issue to tell, do it. As long as it's good.

Hurricane Heeran
15908 Herman Way #5
Van Nuys, CA 91406

For those not as ancient as H.H. and MWB, "Katana" was a character in a super-hero book called The Outsiders *that I wrote for DC a while ago. As a samurai, she would threaten to carry the lungs of readers who voiced unpopular opinions (i.e., who didn't like her) in a bucket, which led to the creation of an unofficial fan club called "The Bucketlung Brigade." She and Jennifer would get along fine.*

-- MWB

Dear Mr. Barr,

I've been following ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** since the first issue, and I thought I would take the occasion of the 12th (which would have been the first anniversary if it hadn't been for the hiatus after the Comico run) to write and congratulate you on such an excellent book.

I think that you have done extremely well in adapting this detective/romance genre into the comic medium. I always look forward to each new issue, and I'm so happy that all of the problems at Comico didn't bring this ***MAZE*** to an end.

I also want to mention that I very much appreciated your homage to "Remington Steele" in issue ***#12*** with the reference to Laura Holt. Just as I believe "Remington Steele" was the best television adaptation of this genre, I also believe that ***MAZE*** will

prove to be the best comic adaptation (and I hope we the readers are lucky enough to see 94 issues of ***MAZE***, just as we were treated to 94 episodes of "Remington Steele").

Down to particulars: The strongest part of ***MAZE*** is the character development you treat us to on occasion; it truly enriches the characters and adds even more to the book. That's something most comics never take the time to do.

As for the mysteries, they're always interesting and perplexing -- but I have to say that sometimes I think they develop and then resolve too quickly. I know that early on you stated that you liked wrapping the stories up in one issue, but I really think that sometimes the stories need a little more time with the development of the mystery. Often the reader only gets to meet each suspect once, and that just isn't enough time to develop opinions and theories. I also don't like comics to stretch themselves out too long, but I believe that occasionally it would be all right to have the stories be two-parters. That wouldn't be so long that the story would seem padded, but it would allow for a little more character development with the "guest stars," while also allowing the reader to ponder the result for a month.

And in closing I would also like to praise the artwork in this fine book. The simple truth is that it's one of the more visually appealing comics around.

I lost the address and signature
of this correspondent.
Mr. Anonymous, please drop us a line! Sorry.
-- *MWB*

More talk about two-issue stories! Some readers want 'em, some readers want things the way they are, with stories told in one-issue installments. If you've got an opinion on this, why not let us know?

-- *MWB*

Dear Mike,

It was a pleasure seeing Adam Hughes back in ***MAZE AGENCY #12*** -- a story completed quite a while ago, I'm told. It did look lovely! Layouts were imaginative, textures smooth -- Rick obtains some wonderful effects with his inks. A pity Adam's been swayed away by one of the other little companies around! And while Susan Glod is a new name to me in the colourist stakes, she also provided a sterling work. Gabe and Jen look particularly good with this trio.

As far as the story goes, I thought you gave the game away by making the eventual culprit the only one of the suspects whose character was really fleshed out. The three siblings were given a couple of pages to introduce them and make it clear what their relationship with their father was. After this, though, there was a noticeable absence of red herrings. There was nothing to differentiate among the three of them, whereas more and more details emerged on Handers as the story progressed. I thought the prolonged action scene around the drop took up space that could have been better used elsewhere in the story. It makes me wonder whether you shouldn't try some two-parters? I'm sure this could easily be achieved without breaking the feeling of suspense and intrigue that you successfully build up as the tale progresses and as the plot thickens. It would also give more room for each of the two major thrusts of ***MAZE AGENCY*** -- the mysteries, and Gabe & Jen's relationship. Sometime there's a feeling that you're not sure which to concentrate on. Sorry to nit-pick, but I just thought this particular riddle wasn't as well-set as previous ones!

Malcolm Bourne
2 & 4 Bye Road
England

Dear Mike,

Let me tell you why ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** is the first comic to which I have written a letter. (Actually, I've had two *Groo-Grams* printed, which I count among my greatest accomplishments, but I wouldn't call them so much letters as epistolary masterpieces.)

Mystery has never been my interest, but ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** often makes me regret that I haven't yet read any Ellery Queen; I hadn't even heard of it until this book. Fortunately, I was a big fan of Encyclopedia Brown, so I couldn't pass up a book with ***THE MAZE AGENCY***'s focus. I've wanted to write in the past -- when I heard that Innovation was adopting the title and when I heard that Adam Hughes had gotten a job at *Justice League* -- but I never did get around to it. Upon reading issue twelve I decided this was the issue about which to write, and your plea for mail convinced me.

The characters and ideas behing ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** have so much potential, and issue ***#12*** was the strongest use of them so far. The story moved really smoothly and the action was character-oriented. I got a feel for all the character's personalities, especially Jen and Gabe's. I have to say much of that came from Adam Hughes' art. He didn't only make Jen look great, he implied how beautiful she would be in real life. It's jarring seeing another artist draw these characters. I was really happy to hear that I'd be seeing Adam's art in *Justice League*, but I was hoping he would still be able to do this book. Seeing various artists render *Justice League* characters is interesting, but Jen and Gabe are very specific personalities (without costumes, incidentally), and I got very used to Adam's version. I wonder how I would see them had Alan Davis and Paul Neary actually done this book. Robb Phipp pencils are looking good, and I'm looking forward to seeing him and his version of Jen and Gabe develop. Another good thing is that I get to see Rick Magyar's inks over someone else's pencils.

Gene Yu
P.O. Box 4103
Brown University
Providence, RI 02912

NEXT ISSUE: *When "America's Video Lineup" did an episode about Dr. Antony Rune, all they were expecting were a jump in ratings. But they got an actual murder, which Dr. Rune claims he's innocent of! Can anyone straighten this mystery out? Oh, I think so! Be here for* ***THE MAZE AGENCY #18*** *when "This Murder Comes To You Live," guest-pencilled by* ***Scott Clark*** *and, as usual, written by --*

--Mike W. Barr

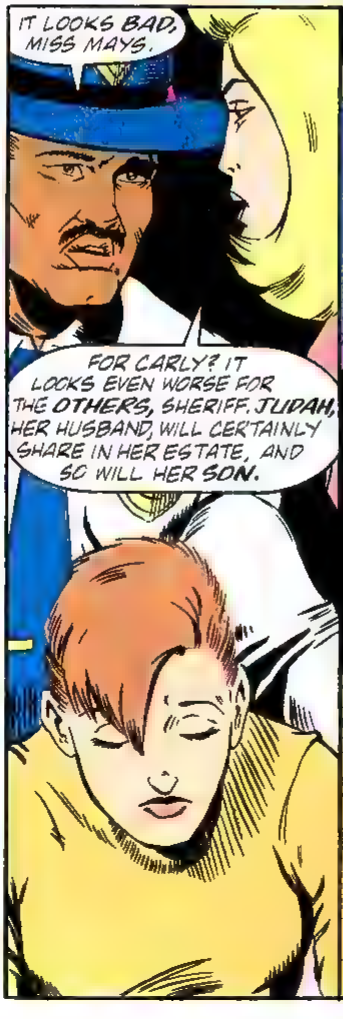
KAREN AND STEVE DON'T SEEM TO REALIZE WHAT'S UP.
DON'T BE TOO HARD ON THEM, THEY'RE TOO DISTRAUGHT TO REALIZE THAT THE ENDS OF THE SEVERED TENT FABRIC POINT OUT...
...WHICH MEANS THE TENT WAS CUT BY SOMEONE WHO WAS INSIDE IT!
I WAS CONCERNED THAT CARLY GET THAT DREADFUL CULT OUT OF HER SYSTEM...I SHOULD HAVE WORRIED MORE ABOUT THAT BOY!
I BROUGHT A LITTLE BACKUP, MISS MAYS, IN CASE THE STRENGTH OF THE LAW ISN'T ENOUGH.
WE MAY NEED THEM, SHERIFF. THERE SEEMS TO BE NO ONE HOME HERE.
PANNING
THEN MAYBE THEY'RE IN THERE. POP IT OPEN, BOYS!
BAM BAM BAM
NO ANSWER HERE, EITHER--BETTER DO THIS ONE, TOO!
BILLINGS--!
HE SEEMS TO BE BREATHING, SHERIFF.
17

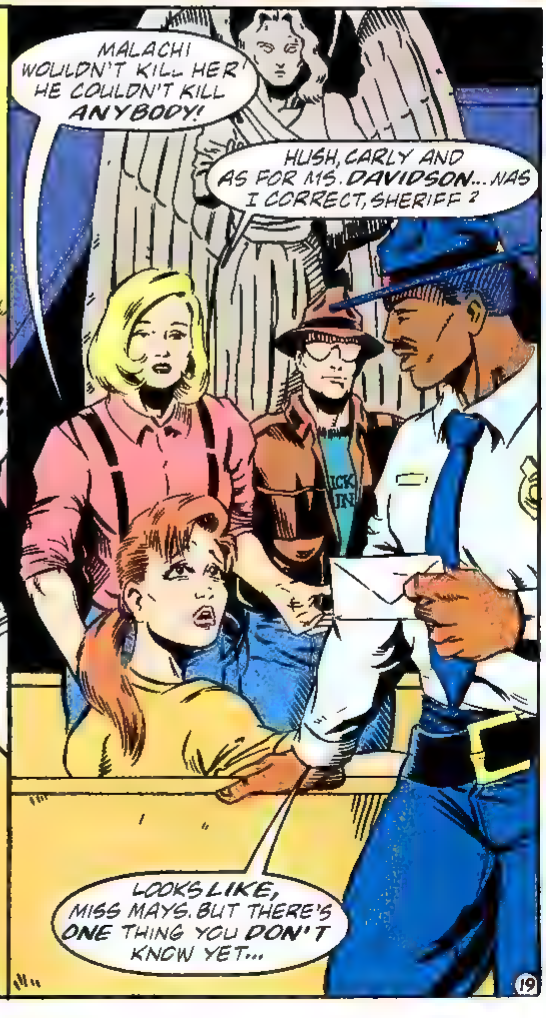
SHE'S NOT!
KEEP THAT DOOR SHUT, YOU UNDERSTAND? NO ONE ENTERS OR LEAVES WITHOUT MY OKAY!
NOTE THAT SMELL IN THE AIR, SHERIFF? LIKE SOME SORT OF GAS...
SHERIFF? ANOTHER ONE BACK HERE!
WHAT'S HAPPENED..?
CARLY, MY HEAD HURTS...!
YOU'RE IN A GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE, YOUNG LADY!
AUNT JEN! I DON'T CARE, I LOVE MALACHI, AND--
IT'S MUCH WORSE THAN THAT, CARLY!
MALACHI, THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG! WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE, BEFORE--
THEY WON'T EVEN LET ME SEE MY BABY...?
SHERIFF MARKHAM HAS SEALED OFF THE SCENE, KAREN. BELIEVE ME, I'LL LOOK OUT FOR HER.
18

THIS LOOKS LIKE IT, SHERIFF! SOME KINDA KNOCKOUT GAS, I'LL BET!
THAT'S HOW THE KILLER COULD MURDER MS STANNER WITHOUT WITNESSES! A HANDKERCHIEF'D FILTER THAT OUT UNTIL HE'D DONE HIS DEED!

CARLY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I RAN OFF TO BE WITH MALACHI, AUNT JEN-- I LOVE HIM! WE WERE GOING TO SPEND THE NIGHT HERE IN THE BUNKER...
...IN HIS MOTHER'S BEDROOM...

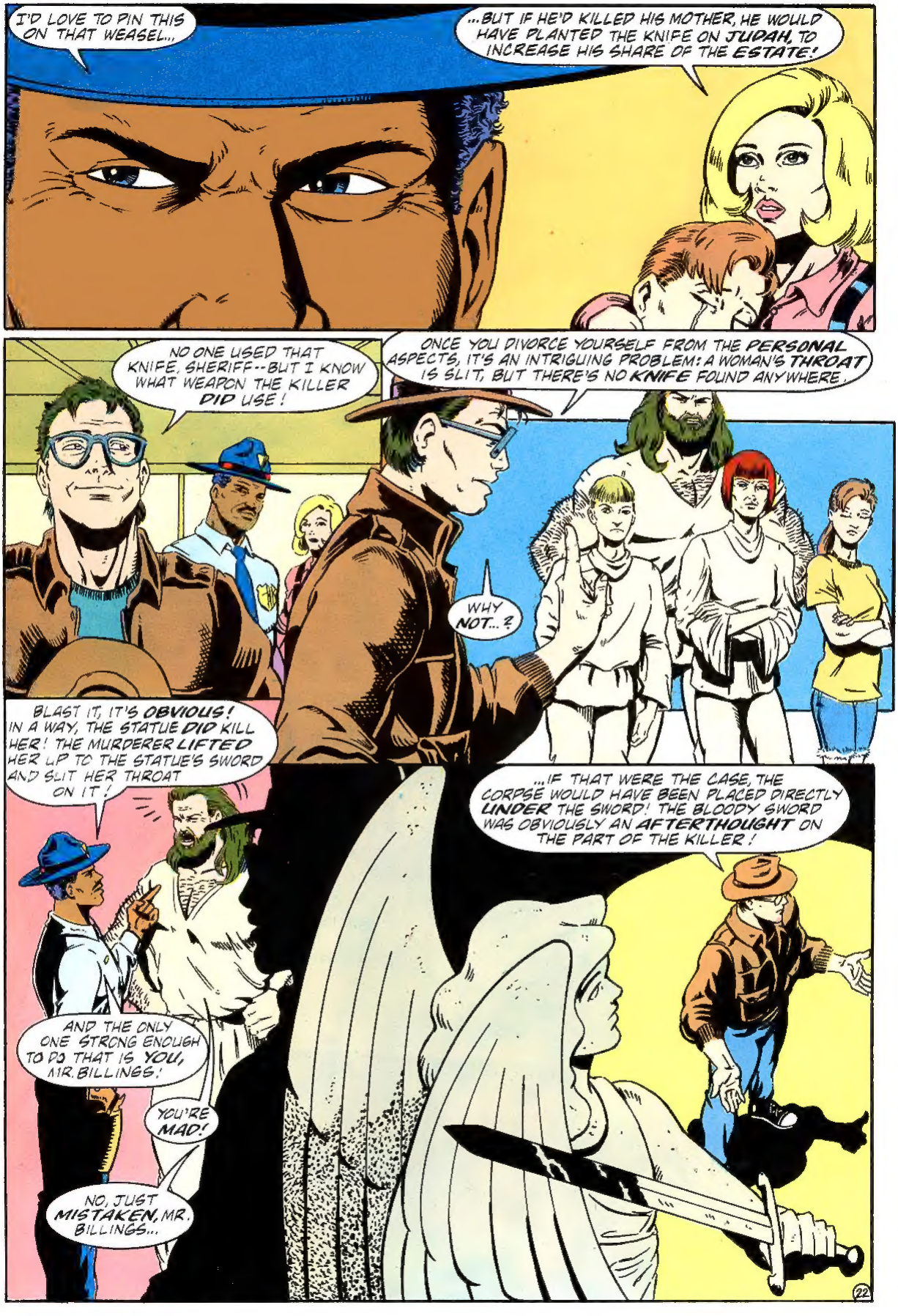
"...BUT I GUESS SHE DECIDED TO SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE BUNKER, TO MAKE SURE EVERYTHING WAS WORKING. SHE HATES ME, SO MALACHI AND I HID...
"...WE TRIED TO STAY AWAKE, TO SEE IF WE COULD SNEAK OUT, BUT THE NEXT THING I REMEMBER WAS WAKING UP..."

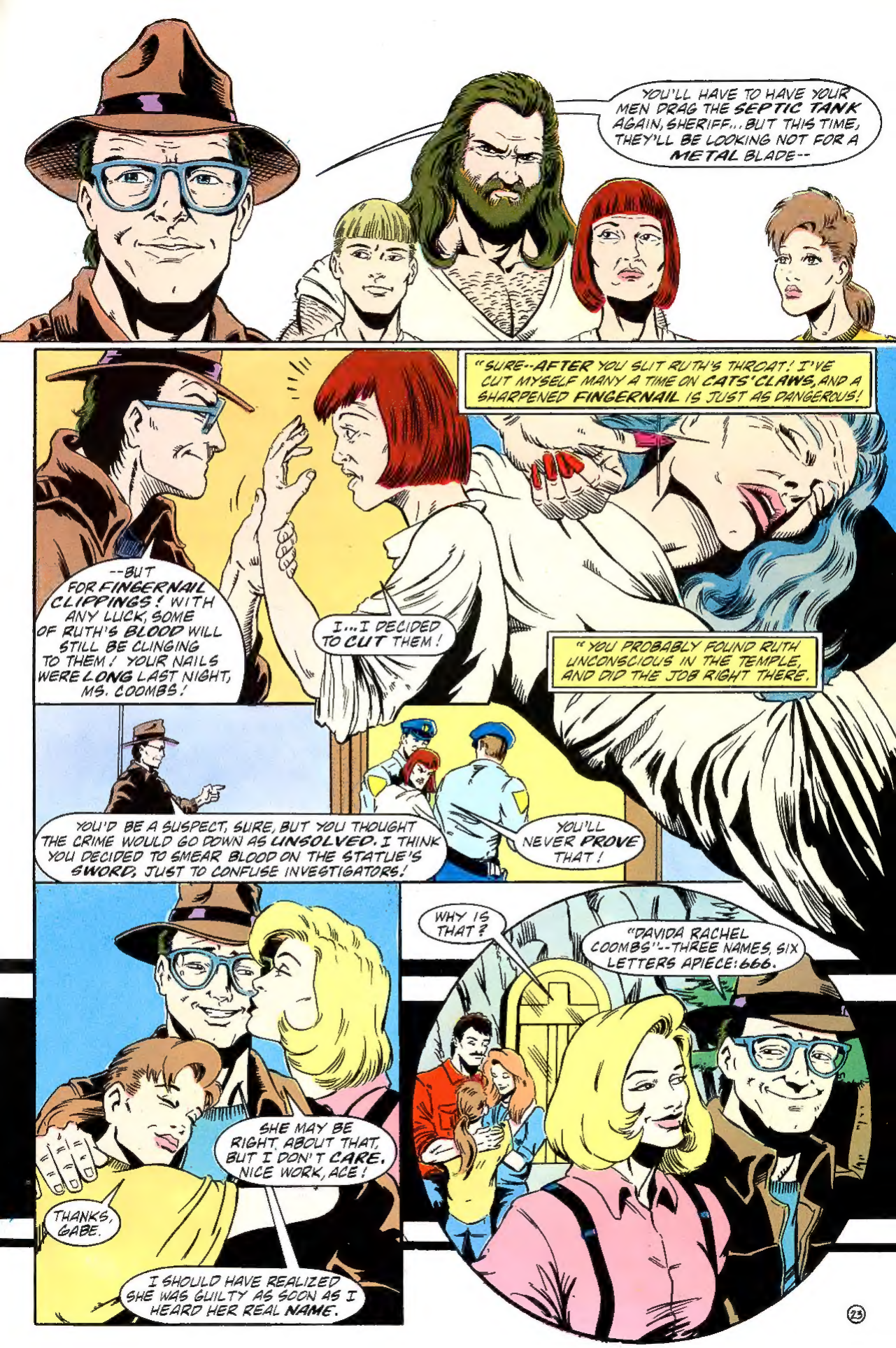

IT LOOKS BAD, MISS MAYS.
FOR CARLY? IT LOOKS EVEN WORSE FOR THE OTHERS, SHERIFF. JUDAH, HER HUSBAND, WILL CERTAINLY SHARE IN HER ESTATE, AND SO WILL HER SON.

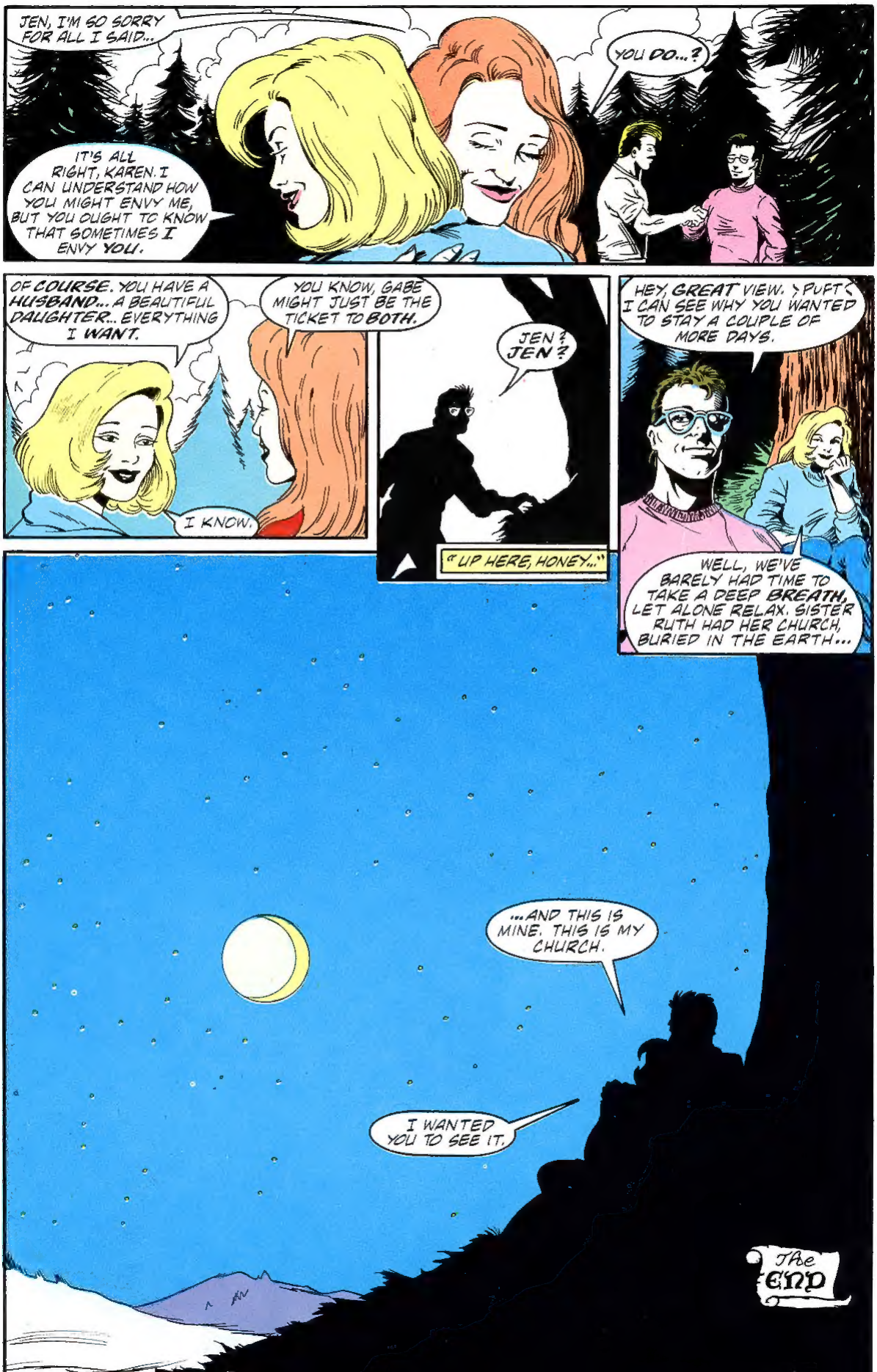

MALACHI WOULDN'T KILL HER! HE COULDN'T KILL ANYBODY!
HUSH, CARLY AND AS FOR MS. DAVIDSON... WAS I CORRECT, SHERIFF?
LOOKS LIKE, MISS MAYS. BUT THERE'S ONE THING YOU DON'T KNOW YET...

MISS RYDELL ADMITS SHE BROUGHT HER DAD'S KNIFE WITH HER. THERE'S NO BLOOD ON IT NOW, BUT IT'S THE ONLY KNIFE OR CUTTING EDGE WE FOUND IN HERE! DOC SAYS HER THROAT WAS CUT BY AN EDGE, NOT A WIRE!
THERE WERE NO RAZOR BLADES, NO GLASS THAT COULD BE BROKEN TO PROVIDE--?
NO BLADES, THE GLASSES ARE UNBREAKABLE PLASTIC, AND THERE'S NO CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TWO BUNKERS.
THE KILLER COULD HAVE BROUGHT A FOLDING KNIFE OR BLADE IN WITH HIM--
--AND FLUSHED IT INTO THE SEPTIC TANK.
I JUST HAD THEM DRAG THE SEPTIC TANK; NO LUCK. WE'VE SEARCHED EVERY INCH OF THIS PLACE, AND THERE'S NO KNIFE.
THERE'S ONE, SHERIFF.
MAYBE THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL GOT TIRED OF HAVING HIS NAME TAKEN IN VAIN...
COME ON, MR. WEBB! I DON'T COTTON TO MIRACLES, IN THIS DAY AND AGE!
YES, POOR RUTH WAS TERRIFIED OF KNIVES--EVEN THERAPY COULDN'T HELP HER. SHE WOULDN'T HAVE THEM IN HER BUNKER.
WHAT ABOUT THAT STATUE? IT CARRIES A SWORD--
AICHMOPHOBIA, IT'S CALLED.
I THOUGHT SO, WHEN I SAW HOW SHE REACTED TO THE KNIFE YOU CARRIED, MR. BILLINGS.
RUTH WAS TERRIFIED OF IT, YET SHE KEPT IT CLOSE TO HER. SHE CONSIDERED IT A TEST OF HER FAITH. PLEASE EXCUSE ME, I MUST PRAY.
20

WHICH NAME DO YOU PREFER, MA'AM? DANIELLE DAVIDSON, OR DAVIDA RACHEL COOMBS?
HOW DID YOU KNOW?
WE TRACED THE FINGERPRINTS FROM YOUR DRINKING GLASS I'D CERTAINLY SAY YOU HAVE A MOTIVE, MS. COOMBS.
DO YOU BLAME ME? MY BROTHER MATTHEW WAS A TROUBLED KID WITH TOO MUCH MONEY WHEN HE MET THAT BITCH! HE JOINED HER CHURCH, WILLED HIS ESTATE TO HER..
...AND SIX MONTHS LATER, HE WAS DEAD.. A SUICIDE, THEY CALLED IT...! I WROTE SOME THREATENING LETTERS TO HER--
SHERIFF, THE BOY SAYS HE HAS SOMETHING TO TELL YOU.
THEN BRING HIM IN-- AND THE GIRL, TOO. ANYTHING ONE HAS TO SAY PROBABLY INVOLVES THE OTHER.
--THAT WAS HOW THEY GOT MY FINGERPRINTS--BUT I'D NEVER MET HER! I FINALLY DECIDED I HAD TO MEET HER, SO I TOOK THIS JOB!
AND YOU JUST DECIDED YOU'D SPEAK UP NOW, HUH?
GET THIS SACK OF FERTILIZER OUT OF MY SIGHT.
NEW YORK POLICE
I DIDN'T WANT TO SAY THIS WITH HER HERE, BUT...
I SAW CARLY LEAVE THE CLOSET LAST NIGHT, SHERIFF--AND SHE TOOK THE KNIFE WITH HER!
MALACHI--?
21


I'D LOVE TO PIN THIS ON THAT WEASEL...
...BUT IF HE'D KILLED HIS MOTHER, HE WOULD HAVE PLANTED THE KNIFE ON JUDAH, TO INCREASE HIS SHARE OF THE ESTATE!
NO ONE USED THAT KNIFE, SHERIFF--BUT I KNOW WHAT WEAPON THE KILLER DID USE!
ONCE YOU DIVORCE YOURSELF FROM THE PERSONAL ASPECTS, IT'S AN INTRIGUING PROBLEM: A WOMAN'S THROAT IS SLIT, BUT THERE'S NO KNIFE FOUND ANYWHERE.
WHY NOT...?
BLAST IT, IT'S OBVIOUS! IN A WAY, THE STATUE DID KILL HER! THE MURDERER LIFTED HER UP TO THE STATUE'S SWORD AND SLIT HER THROAT ON IT!
...IF THAT WERE THE CASE, THE CORPSE WOULD HAVE BEEN PLACED DIRECTLY UNDER THE SWORD! THE BLOODY SWORD WAS OBVIOUSLY AN AFTERTHOUGHT ON THE PART OF THE KILLER!
AND THE ONLY ONE STRONG ENOUGH TO DO THAT IS YOU, MR. BILLINGS!
YOU'RE MAD!
NO, JUST MISTAKEN, MR. BILLINGS...
22


YOU'LL HAVE TO HAVE YOUR MEN DRAG THE SEPTIC TANK AGAIN, SHERIFF... BUT THIS TIME, THEY'LL BE LOOKING NOT FOR A METAL BLADE--
"SURE--AFTER YOU SLIT RUTH'S THROAT! I'VE CUT MYSELF MANY A TIME ON CATS' CLAWS, AND A SHARPENED FINGERNAIL IS JUST AS DANGEROUS!
--BUT FOR FINGERNAIL CLIPPINGS! WITH ANY LUCK, SOME OF RUTH'S BLOOD WILL STILL BE CLINGING TO THEM! YOUR NAILS WERE LONG LAST NIGHT, MS. COOMBS!
I...I DECIDED TO CUT THEM!
"YOU PROBABLY FOUND RUTH UNCONSCIOUS IN THE TEMPLE, AND DID THE JOB RIGHT THERE.
YOU'D BE A SUSPECT, SURE, BUT YOU THOUGHT THE CRIME WOULD GO DOWN AS UNSOLVED. I THINK YOU DECIDED TO SMEAR BLOOD ON THE STATUE'S SWORD, JUST TO CONFUSE INVESTIGATORS!
YOU'LL NEVER PROVE THAT!
SHE MAY BE RIGHT ABOUT THAT, BUT I DON'T CARE. NICE WORK, ACE!
THANKS, GABE.
I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED SHE WAS GUILTY AS SOON AS I HEARD HER REAL NAME.
WHY IS THAT?
"DAVIDA RACHEL COOMBS"--THREE NAMES, SIX LETTERS APIECE: 666.


JEN, I'M SO SORRY FOR ALL I SAID...
IT'S ALL RIGHT, KAREN. I CAN UNDERSTAND HOW YOU MIGHT ENVY ME, BUT YOU OUGHT TO KNOW THAT SOMETIMES I ENVY YOU.
YOU DO...?
OF COURSE. YOU HAVE A HUSBAND... A BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER... EVERYTHING I WANT.
I KNOW.
YOU KNOW, GABE MIGHT JUST BE THE TICKET TO BOTH.
JEN? JEN?
"UP HERE, HONEY..."
HEY, GREAT VIEW. PUFF I CAN SEE WHY YOU WANTED TO STAY A COUPLE OF MORE DAYS.
WELL, WE'VE BARELY HAD TIME TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH, LET ALONE RELAX. SISTER RUTH HAD HER CHURCH, BURIED IN THE EARTH...
...AND THIS IS MINE. THIS IS MY CHURCH.
I WANTED YOU TO SEE IT.
The END

INNOVATION™

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